

Free lifeboat ethics: a case against helping the poor essay example

[Environment](#), [Earth](#)



In his article, *Lifeboat Ethics: A Case against Helping the Poor*, Garret Hardin brings forward the argument of whether rich nations should help the poor ones. Hardin claims that economic support strategies for the world's developing nations such as the World Food bank will not help to alleviate the problems that plague these nations. Hardin's basic claim is that the world is already doing too much in helping the poor. Because of this poor, the poor have absolutely no inclination to help themselves. He is of the opinion that public is blatantly interested in assisting the less fortunate and states, " In their enthusiastic but unrealistic generosity, they confuse the ethics of a spaceship with those of a lifeboat. Hardin sentiments are accurate because he uses vivid examples and analogies to worldly situations that indeed show that helping the poor is not really a long-term solution to ending the problem of world poverty. On the other hand, he fails to realize that simply curtailing food aid to the world's poor will actually not have any benefits if the poor are not given ample tools to nullify their poverty and hunger problems and make economic strides.

Hardin's article main postulate is that the earth is actually not a place where everyone has an equal right to every single one of the earth's resources. The former description would classify earth as a spaceship but this it does not really meet the qualifications of spaceship. It is rather like a lifeboat, which has limited space. Additionally, lifeboats do not have a captain and have limited food supply. This is a very strong comparison, which makes a lot of sense. Earth has a very limited capacity to effectively support its population. In many ways, humans have already exceeded the carrying capacity of earth. Therefore, drastic actions must be immediately taken to ensure the

continued survival of the planet and indeed the human species.

The second point that Hardin makes regards the “tragedy of commons”.

According to him, “Under a system of private property, the men who own it recognize their responsibility to care for it, for if they do not, they will eventually suffer.” He goes on to claim that if for example a pasture was to be opened to everyone (the commons), the personal responsibility to care for this pasture will slowly but surely diminish. Hardin is very correct in making this argument because it is something that is clear in the world today. For instance, the same public who own gigantic natural resources is slowly depleting the resources that were formerly the epitomes of the world’s economic and social thrive. Instead of caring for this public property, humans tend to destroy it. A brilliant example is the Amazon forest, the world’s largest hub for flora and fauna. Humans seeking to conduct economic activities such as farming on the land have destroyed a significant portion of this massive rainforest. This is a clear-cut example of the tragedy of commons where when a public resource is accessible to everyone, an element of irresponsibility inadvertently arises.

The other sound argument that Hardin makes relates to the World Food Bank idea. Hardin starts by relating this food bank to a kind of commons. He states that it is “an international depository of food reserves to which nations would contribute according to their abilities and from which they would draw according to their needs”. He talks about the inevitability of emergencies and how developed nations learn from these emergencies and prepare future budgets to cater for them. Poor nations unfortunately do not seem to learn from the various emergencies that plague them. Hardin

asserts that the idea of a world food bank has more negative implications than positive ones. He is very correct in his assertion because of one fact. If the poor nations understand that there is always a food reserve where they can always run whenever their nations are faced by food problems, then they will never be motivated to adequately prepare for such emergencies. Consequently, they will continue suffering progressively larger emergencies as their local populations grow even higher.

Although one may be prompted to agree with all of Hardin's assertions, it does however sound a little bit harsh. It is true that the flow of aid from rich nations to poor nations should halt immediately because it only creates dependence on the poor nation's part. However, before taking such drastic action, there is a need to question its nature. What the poor nations really need is education, they need to be taught new ways to grow their crops, to manage their situations and indeed resolve their problems. They should be taught how to read because illiteracy seems to be the underlying cause of many of their problems. Hardin's idea of the "lifeboat ethics" is very well stated but he however does seem to forget one fact and that is the entire universe is in fact in one boat. If globalization has done anything, it is to make us realize that we have absolutely no choice but to come to terms with the fact that we cannot isolate ourselves from others. The things that affect the poor nations will eventually catch up with the rich ones. The anger of the world's underprivileged will in the end cause problems. Problems lead to revolutions and the revolutions have absolutely no mercy on anyone once they get out of hand. Hardin is correct in stating that poor nations need to stand for themselves. However, when there is no compass to show the place to land, the

ship holding the poor at the very bottom and the rich at the top will eventually crumble and sink because of the holes dug through by the poor. The poor needs to be stopped from making such holes. Aid should be sent, but not in terms of money, food and water, but in the form of direction, education and ideas.

In conclusion, Garret Hardin's Lifeboat Ethics: A Case against Helping the Poor is an accurate description of what is currently going on earth. However, his argument is not conclusive and there is need for thoughts to be extended beyond its main argument of not aiding the world's poor nations. Sure, the rich nations can cut their food and money aid to the world's poor nations, but then, what happens next? The poor have already learnt to depend on the rich for aid and if this is taken away abruptly and without the provision of alternatives, , they will be completely overwhelmed. What the rich nations need to do is to stop sending aid in form of food. Instead, they should concentrate on equipping the poor with tools that can be used to solve their own problems and improve their economic situation.