

# Boat of ethics assignment

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Noah's Ark; Lonely but Happy Ecology, most simply put, is "the study of relationships between organisms and their environment". (Encyclopedia Britannica) Garrett Hardin, writer of the essay Lifeboat Ethics: The Case against Helping the Poor was a professor of human ecology at the University of California at Santa Barbara and had some extremely harsh opinions about the solution to global population issues. As a professor of human ecology, Hardin studied the relationship between humans and their environment, and in this case the entire globe.

It is a well known fact that environmental degradations, unequal wealth distribution and exponential population growth are growing problems in the world, and in his essay, Hardin explains that there are relatively simple solutions to these problems. While Hardin's solutions to the interconnected global environment, economic and population problems are harsh and potentially immoral, Hardin convinced me they are the only solutions to a growing global issue.

Hardin begins his essay shedding light on a metaphor environmentalists use to help prevent pollution, stating that the earth is a spaceship, and no one has the right to waste or destroy what should be equally shared between its inhabitants. Hardin immediately disputes this metaphor by asking "does everyone on earth have an equal right to an equal share of its resources?" (358) Hardin points out that this metaphor causes unrealistic expectations of an equal and fair global society since there are currently not enough resources in the world to be evenly distributed.

Hardin argues that the spaceship analogy is false, saying that “ A true spaceship would have to be under the control of a captain, since no ship could possibly survive if its course were determined by committee.

Spaceship Earth certainly has no captain; the United States is merely a toothless tiger, with little power to enforce any policy upon its bickering members. ” (358) Hardin instead makes the analogy that the earth can be compared to a lifeboat, since a lifeboat has a carrying capacity as well as limited resources.

Hardin poses the unethical question of who gets to be in the lifeboat if the amount of people outside the boat exceeds the amount of people that can safely be in the boat. This is where Hardin’s argument becomes abhorrent to some people, however, I believe it was extremely persuasive and I will not dismiss an rgument because of harsh truths. Hardin also points out the discrepancies in the wealth distribution and how they correlate to reproductive growth.

Hardin specifies that “ The people inside the lifeboats are doubling in numbers every 87 years; those swimming around outside are doubling, on the average, every 35 years, more than twice as fast as the rich. And since the world’s resources are dwindling, the difference in prosperity between the rich and the poor can only increase. ” (359) This was an excellent point to make in that it demonstrates specifically how poorer ations are typically increasing in population much faster than richer ones.

Hardin continues his argument by explaining what he believes to be “ the tragedy ot the commons”, in that people will only take care ot something it

they believe it is inherently theirs. Since we can assume that the majority of people operate based on their own needs, that means that people will have less discretion on maintaining or even protecting what is supposed to be shared. Hardin makes an excellent point when he says that “ Under the system of private property, the men who own property recognize their responsibility to care for it, for if they don’t, they will eventually suffer. (360) Hardin calls the world’s natural resources a global commons, and “ In a crowded world of less than perfect human beings, mutual ruin is inevitable if there are no controls. This is the tragedy of the commons. ” (360) Hardin’s analogy of natural resources as a shared entity that needs more stringent regulations is extremely logical to me. Hardin then goes into detail about how the humanitarians of the world have tried advocating for the less fortunate countries, including the Food for Peace program, and how they were supposed to help the poorer populations and make a change in the global standard of living.

However, Hardin argues that it is not a good idea to help the less fortunate populations. Hardin then goes on to explain how the World Food Bank, a government operated, tax-payer funded operation, is merely “ a commons in disguise” (363) Hardin argues that “ in the short run, a world food bank may diminish that need [for food], but in the long run it actually increases the need without limit” (363) and “ poor countries will not learn to mend their ways, and will suffer progressively greater emergencies as their populations grow. (362) Hardin makes another excellent point saying that “ We cannot safely divide the wealth equitably among all people so long as people reproduce at different rates. ” (366) This concept was the most persuasive to

me because it is completely accurate that no one can become self-sufficient if they always have a safety net, and as harsh as it sounds, the boy will always be lazy if his parents keep running to his aid every time he cries wolf. While Hardin's arguments are harsh and often cruel, they are impeccable from global environmental, economic and population issue standpoints.

Hardin believes that “ Without a true world government to control reproduction and the use of available resources, the sharing ethic of the spaceship is impossible... [and] our survival demands that we govern our actions by the ethics of a lifeboat” (366) and I completely agree with his argument. I am aware that I am already in this metaphorical lifeboat, along with everyone else I know, however that does not negate facts, and those are that if we do not begin to control growth of human population on earth, then we will destroy all life in the process of allowing the uncontrolled creation of life.

It is unfortunate that it is the poorer countries who are suffering, but nature is cruel and natural selection dictates the survival of the fittest. Hardin convinced me of his argument by providing exceptional analogies, undeniable facts and a concise layout of his argument. Hardin's life work is human ecology, and while his credentials speak for themselves, he also did an outstanding job of getting me to turn my back on a moral and ethical solution to the global issues of a bloated earth.