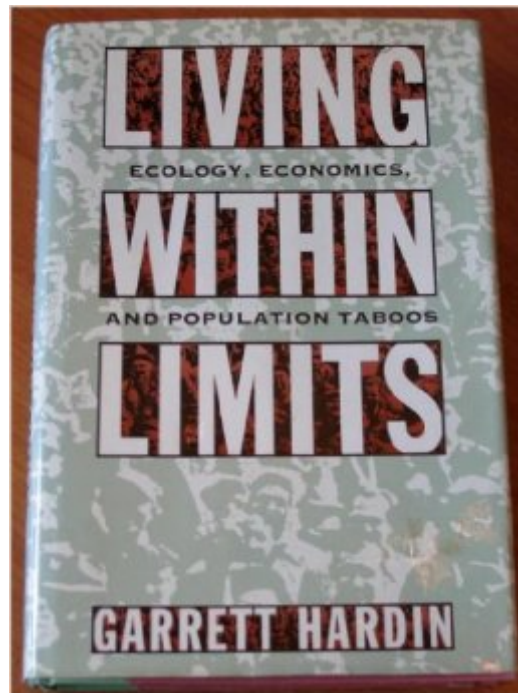


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Living Within Limits: Ecology, Economics, And Population Taboos



Synopsis

"We fail to mandate economic sanity," writes Garrett Hardin, "because our brains are addled by...compassion." With such startling assertions, Hardin has cut a swathe through the field of ecology for decades, winning a reputation as a fearless and original thinker. A prominent biologist, ecological philosopher, and keen student of human population control, Hardin now offers the finest summation of his work to date, with an eloquent argument for accepting the limits of the earth's resources--and the hard choices we must make to live within them. In *Living Within Limits*, Hardin focuses on the neglected problem of overpopulation, making a forceful case for dramatically changing the way we live in and manage our world. Our world itself, he writes, is in the dilemma of the lifeboat: it can only hold a certain number of people before it sinks--not everyone can be saved. The old idea of progress and limitless growth misses the point that the earth (and each part of it) has a limited carrying capacity; sentimentality should not cloud our ability to take necessary steps to limit population. But Hardin refutes the notion that goodwill and voluntary restraints will be enough. Instead, nations where population is growing must suffer the consequences alone. Too often, he writes, we operate on the faulty principle of shared costs matched with private profits. In Hardin's famous essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons," he showed how a village common pasture suffers from overgrazing because each villager puts as many cattle on it as possible--since the costs of grazing are shared by everyone, but the profits go to the individual. The metaphor applies to global ecology, he argues, making a powerful case for closed borders and an end to immigration from poor nations to rich ones. "The production of human beings is the result of very localized human actions; corrective action must be local....Globalizing the 'population problem' would only ensure that it would never be solved." Hardin does not shrink from the startling implications of his argument, as he criticizes the shipment of food to overpopulated regions and asserts that coercion in population control is inevitable. But he also proposes a free flow of information across boundaries, to allow each state to help itself. "The time-honored practice of pollute and move on is no longer acceptable," Hardin tells us. We now fill the globe, and we have no where else to go. In this powerful book, one of our leading ecological philosophers points out the hard choices we must make--and the solutions we have been afraid to consider.

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Customer Reviews

This book is essential reading. As someone lucky enough to have called Garrett Hardin my friend, I was once with him at one of his book signings in Santa Barbara, California. As two rather prosperous looking young women rushed by his display table, one said to the other: "'Limits'--I don't like it!" After which Hardin turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and said, "You see, she just summarized my whole problem." But one of the things that Professor Hardin is still teaching us, through his books and his students, is that once we accept the fact that the world has real ecological limits--for example, we stop assuming that we can cram a quarter-billion people into America, or that affordable substitutes for finite resources like oil and topsoil will be generated magically by the marketplace--the quality of our lives will actually improve. It is something like the little boy who has many scattered ambitions, from cowboy to Superman, upon reaching maturity being able to focus in on the adventure of passionately pursuing life's real possibilities. In his own life Hardin was anything but grim. Garrett Hardin just wanted to help our society grow up and, as said in Corinthians, put away childish things.

I would give this book 99 stars if I could. Garrett Hardin, most famous for his essay 'The Tragedy of the Commons' (look it up on Wikipedia), intellectually eviscerates anyone who would be so foolish as to think that overpopulation is NOT a problem. Nearly every human ill can be attributed to the simple phrase 'too many people and too few resources,' and Hardin attacks this issue from every angle. As a self styled 'ecological conservative' Hardin attacks both liberal democratic and traditional conservative ideology. I thought I knew a little bit about 'real' economics until I read this book, boy was I wrong. If, like me, you thought that Freakonomics was cutting edge and savvy then you would definitely love this book. Hardin clearly has a firm grasp on what economics is actually about. He throws everything at you - natural selection, Thomas Malthus, carrying capacity, demographics,

Unmanaged Commons and so much more that this book is sure to open your eyes to the growing problem around us. The only negative thing (hence the -1 star from 100) I can say about the book is that there is little continuity or flow to it. Rather than any continuous theme, it seems more like his lecture notes stuck together in some kind of topical series. Besides that, I highly highly recommend everyone read this book - sadly though, I am a realist and know that few will (to society's detriment). If you like this book, you will like *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*; or if you liked *Collapse*, then you will like this book.

Reading this book was a revelation. In clear and precise prose, Hardin articulated all the feelings I'd had after years of observing people and their behavior. In the same way overly zealous Christians force the bible upon non-believers, I press this book and its ideas upon others. If everyone were to read this one single book and adhere to its simple and logical tenets, the world would be a reasonable and content place. What is even scarier than the future world we are going to inherit due to the people who impose misguided policies upon others solely to feel good about themselves is the fact that NO ONE outside of universities knows of this man or his books. I occasionally discuss his most famous essay *The Tragedy of the Commons* with some of the students in my college classes, and even though they all freely admit that his arguments and reasoning are irrefutable, they still think he's wrong because they "don't like" what he's saying. They offer no response or logical counter offer, they just "don't like it." Sadly, these people vote and shape our world, and the majority of my community unfortunately feels the same. If you have any interest in learning better and more productive ways of making choices and viewing the world regardless of the attractiveness of those guidelines, I cannot recommend this book enough.

1st edition, reissued (1995), 311 pages This is another of the twenty books that Charlie Munger recommends in the 2nd edition of *Poor Charlie's Almanack* (which I cannot recommend more highly). When a very widely read and highly effective thinker like Munger gets to eighty years old and recommends a list of just twenty books, I think one would be justified in expecting all of them to be pretty good. Even so, as I make my way through his list I find myself pleasantly surprised at just how good some of them are. The clarity of thought Hardin demonstrates in this book is simply superb. There is an important difference comparing this book to most others. Because so much of his subject matter (the subtitle is: *'Ecology, Economics and Population Taboos'*) is smeared over by taboo and emotion, Hardin appears to have decided that in order to deal with this problem he also needs to demonstrate how to think properly. Thus it is really two books in one: a manual on how to

think effectively and a treatise on his chosen subject. For example, he hammers home the importance of default positions to provide the foundation for critical judgement (in economics: there's no such thing as a free lunch; in psychology: reward determines behaviour; in ecology: and then what?). I am left with a feeling of gratitude towards both Munger and Hardin - without either of whom I would not have read this marvellous book.

A book about population and worldly limits would be uninteresting, most people would say. Not so about this book. Garrett Hardin puts it straight to the point, with no bull or flowery language. This is good especially for me, because science is not particularly my strongest area of interest. The author puts the scientific facts in everyday language. In this book Mr. Hardin exhausts every possibility for counter theories on population growth. I recommend this book to anyone that will be living in the next century. I feel it almost to be a duty to know what is in store for this planet if kept at this current pace.

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