

Layla Johnston
Illinois State University
email: lmjohn4@ilstu.edu

The Limits on Privatizing the Commons

Abstract: This paper is a critique of Garret Hardin's influential 1968 essay "The Tragedy of the Commons," an article featured in most environmental ethics and environmental policy undergraduate courses. I counter Hardin's claims that privatizing natural resources leads to less consumption and natural resource preservation with examples of the continuous depletion and pollution of freshwater resources transferred from communal to private ownership. Examples of environmental ethics grounded in communal ethics, such as the biocentric philosophy of Vandana Shiva, are offered as alternatives to Hardin's ethical claims.

Garret Hardin's 1968 essay "The Tragedy of the Commons," is considered a landmark publication for the relatively new philosophy of a specifically "environmental" ethics, as practiced and studied in the Western ethical philosophical tradition (Schmidtz and Willott, 2002). Hardin's follow up essay, "Living on a Lifeboat," (first published 1974), extends the arguments brought forth in "The Tragedy of the Commons" to justify privatizing common resources and limiting immigration from poor to developed nations in the name of preserving natural resources (Schmidtz and Willott, 2002). Hardin's arguments, however, are deeply rooted in a particular ideological framework, based on the classical liberal philosophy espoused by the founders of the United States, and are less applicable when read as an "environmental" ethic.

In order to understand the ideological components necessary for Hardin's version of the commons to be an accurate representation of human interactions, we must first examine the political philosophy underpinning the ideas held by many in the United States. The liberal tradition in the United States, based on the philosophy of John Locke, as well as the political economy of Adam Smith, emphasizes the primacy of rights to life,

to liberty, and to property. According to classical liberal theory, these rights can only be held by individuals. While traditional Lockean natural law has come under much recent philosophical attack for its characterization of and reliance on the autonomous, rational, self-interested actor, this paper will examine the futility of extending Locke's conception of individually held rights, particularly that of property, to effectively address one of Hardin's significant environmental issues: the preservation of communally held natural resources, such as water systems. I will argue that three key components prevent the classical liberal concept of property rights from being effectively extended to the realm of environmental politics, particularly at the global level, contrary to Garrett Hardin's claims in his much cited articles referenced above. First of all, individuals, under the tenets of classical liberalism, are the sole holders of rights; emphasis on the individual as rights-holder ignores communal and/or indigenous ethics, which often include other species as worthy of rights and respect. Secondly, the levels of personal consumption and despoiling of communally held resources encouraged and even necessitated by our global capitalist system cannot be effectively reduced by transferring public ownership of resources to private. And third, perhaps most importantly, the recent push by multinational corporations to privatize previously commonly held assets necessary for all forms of life, such as water, privileges elite property holders at the expense of a wide swath of humanity and ignores the rights of future generations. Prioritizing property rights, as in the tradition of classical liberalism, actually encourages use and exploitation of the biosphere, in the name of private profit, and does not encourage private resource preservation.

Rights and Natural Law

In order to understand Hardin's particular use of language and phrasing in his two highly influential articles, I will lay out a brief and highly condensed history of political liberalism. Only by examining the roots of Hardin's ideological vision can we understand the shortcomings of his commons scenario, and also the appeal of his argument to other self-proclaimed liberal environmentalists. The supreme player in classical liberalism is the individual. Rights to property, life, and so forth are held at birth by individuals, who then aggregate into political communities and willingly set limitations on their rights, a social contract, in order to further the chances for self-realization a stable government can provide. "Men are naturally in that state and remain so till by their own consents they make themselves members of some politic society" (Locke, 127). Liberals envision people to be rational, self-interested actors of equal status and abilities, interacting in the public sphere, oftentimes the marketplace: "The promises and bargains for truck, etc., between two men...or between a Swiss and an Indian in the woods of America, are binding to them, though they are perfectly in a state of nature in reference to one another; for truth and keeping of faith belongs to men as men, and not as members of society" (Locke, 130). The two fundamental tenets of liberalism, liberty and equality, are always caught up in a certain degree of tension, but the social contract promoted by Locke allows for governmental protection of individual rights, especially property rights.

In order to understand the importance of an individual's right to private property in Locke's version of the social contract, the influence of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* must be acknowledged. In Hobbes' state of nature, humans are consistently at war with one another over resources. Actions are neither just nor unjust, and everyone has a right

to all things in the Hobbesian state of nature, so long as they are strong enough to either defend their own goods or demand the goods of another. Men (*sic*) are incapable of learning or using reasonable thought in the dog-eat-dog world of Hobbes, and only prudence can guide us toward some version of “civil society.” Looking to history and past experience for guidance, prudence recommends peace and cooperation between all for the better of all, but “competition, diffidence, and glory” lead men to war unless there is a “common power to keep them all in awe,” the sovereign government or ruler (Hobbes 106-109).

Hobbes’ justifications for rule by monarchy and pessimistic view of humanity are some of the most influential political philosophies ever written in the English language. Subsequently, John Locke’s state of nature and social contract theory are modeled on Hobbes’, with an ameliorating twist. Following the thinking of the secular humanism of the Enlightenment, Locke allows for faith in human reason, the capacity for men (*sic*) to learn and cooperate for the betterment of all society, and not just to avoid pain and discomfort as in the Hobbesian version of the social contract. But property as a personal right is critical to Locke’s version of the social contract, and he justifies privatizing natural resources through the labor of the individual. According to Locke:

whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature has provided, and left it in, he has mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property... We see in commons, which remain so by compact, that it is the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state nature leaves it in, which begins the property; without which the common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part does not depend on the express consent of all the commoners. Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of anybody. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, has fixed my property in them (132-133).

So a field belongs to nature until I fence it; now it is my own to claim, through my labor. Self-proclaimed environmentalist Garret Hardin reconceptualizes a Hobbesian state of nature to lay the groundwork for what he terms the “commons,” modeling his call for private property as a safeguard against plunder of the commons on Locke’s modification of the Hobbesian state of nature.

But Hardin has set up a straw man argument, in his commons scenario. Hardin’s ultimate claim is that we must limit population, particularly immigrant population, by force if necessary, in order to protect what remaining resources we have in the United States. Hardin presents his argument as contradictory to the claims of Adam Smith’s invisible-hand, laissez-faire economic liberalism, but he ultimately presents a different liberal solution to the population crisis: that of private property. Hardin’s inability to envision the commons as anything but a plundering ground for private gain is due to his ideological bias; private property as the remedy for a so-called problem has a long-standing tradition in the liberal political philosophy of the United States, and Hardin fits squarely into this philosophical vein. Hardin keenly employs the language of liberal arguments, particularly his use of the term “rational.” To demonstrate, I will quote at length from “The Tragedy of the Commons.” For his thought experiment, Hardin sets up an imaginary commons:

Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. ...As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain. Explicitly or implicitly, more or less consciously, he asks, ‘What is the utility to me of adding one more animal to my herd?’ This utility has one negative and one positive component.

1. The positive component is a function of the increment of one animal. Since the herdsman receives all the proceeds from the sale of the additional animal, the positive utility is nearly +1.

2. The negative component is a function of the additional overgrazing created by one or more animal. Since, however, the effects of over-grazing are

shared by all the herdsmen, the negative utility for any particular decision-making herdsman is only a fraction of -1.

Adding together the component partial utilities, the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd. And another; and another...But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. There in is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all (334).

Hardin's commons scenario is continuously described in language that echoes the claims of Hobbes, and Locke's modification of Hobbesian natural law. Hardin refers to the "inherent logic" of the commons, which remorselessly generates tragedy, in strikingly similar language to that of Hobbes' and Locke's varying descriptions of the state of nature, natural law, and natural rights (Hardin, 334). But Hardin employs several assumptions in his commons scenario that cannot be applied universally to all people that share a pasture. For instance, he assumes that ranchers are raising cattle for sale on the market, not for the subsistence of their families or local communities. He then expects rational herdsman to treat the land and the cattle as rational businessmen, in that each exploits the resource to the fullest amount, maximizing short term profit by overgrazing the pasture. In contrast to Hardin's commons scenario, which is typical of the classical liberal tradition necessitated on justifications for private property, indigenous ethics do not advocate a "rational" despoiling of the commons, prioritizing short term profit over long term communal use. Indigenous farmers and ranchers do not treat their animals just as commodities, and realize the long term impact of their actions on the earth over time, imagining the effects of immediate use on the "seventh generation" to come in the future (LaDuke, 1999).

Hardin's ideological liberalism is premised on justifications for private property, as we have noted above in the words of John Locke. Hobbes' warlike state of nature is ameliorated with the linking of bodies to property through labor, thus creating private ownership, in Locke's view of the social contract. Meanwhile, Locke "created the anti-ecological creed that justified the commercial exploitation of natural resources," by depicting uncultivated land as a waste (Dowie, 13). But to Native Americans, as well as other indigenous cultures, "stewardship of the commons was an assumed tenet of the social contract, not something that needed to be debated, preached, or taught in school....(with the coming of the Europeans) The commons was enclosed, and the seeds of environmental tension were sown in the New World by the notion of deeded land, fencing, and private property"(Dowie, 11). Hardin's view of the commons is not an accurate description of the commons of the past in the United States, or the communally held land of indigenous cultures past or present.

Vandana Shiva, a leading public intellectual, feminist, and ecological activist, has consistently challenged Hardin's depiction of the commons as an inaccurate depiction of communal use of land, water, or other resources. "If one individual grows sugar cane and drains that tank dry that is the typical tragedy of the commons that Garret Hardin talks about. But that is not typical of the commons. That is typical of the destruction of the commons. The tragedy is that Western individualized, atomized societies and their academics have imposed on the rest of the world this very false idea that commons by their very nature must degrade. But it is privatized property by its very nature that must ecologically degrade because it is not being managed for ecological maintenance. It is being managed for highest returns" (Shiva 2002, 2).

Hardin continues his commons scenario with a historical reference to the American frontier and the changing social idea of “waste.” Hardin claims that “a hundred and fifty years ago a plainsman could kill an American bison, cut out only the tongue for his dinner, and discard the rest of the animal. He was not in any important sense being wasteful. Today, with only a few thousand bison left, we would be appalled at such behavior” (Hardin 335). But Hardin is glossing over the distinct reasons why an American frontiersman would have discarded the animal as “waste,” which are not because of the “emptiness” of the frontier, and the lack of a “public,” as Hardin claims (335). On the contrary, there was most definitely an American public present at the time of the frontier conquest, a public hungry for lands ceded to the Native Americans through treaty. In order to open up the American West for the pioneer project of Manifest Destiny, the previous inhabitants, Indians, would need to be removed from wild lands. Hardin’s environmental philosophy is also highly influenced by another Enlightenment tradition, that of the dualist separation of humans and nature. The systematic enclosure of Indian lands—their commons—and subsequent removal to the “reservation” are well documented components of the American pioneer adventure known as Manifest Destiny (see Diamond 1997, Nabokov 1978, Zinn 1980, LaDuke 1999). Hardin’s ideological framework, classical liberalism, provides the justification for conquest of Native American lands by the Europeans. Recall the words of John Locke referenced above: if the land is unworked or unfenced, it is wasted, and open to ownership by the first to plant, plow, or fence the field.

The separation of humans from nature is also evident in the American fixation on wilderness preservation, and can be detected in Hardin’s arguments. Historian William

Croton traces the dualist split in environmental philosophy to two movements of importance for American identity and culture: the romantic notion of the sublime, and the myth of the vanishing frontier. “Of the two, the sublime is the older and more pervasive cultural construct, being one of the most important expressions of that broad transatlantic movement we today label as romanticism. The frontier is more peculiarly American, though it too had its European antecedents and parallels” (Croton 72). The story we still tell ourselves of American progress is intricately intertwined with a history predicated on staking out a place on the wilds of the frontier. Carolyn Merchant likens this cultural tale to the “recovery narrative,” in which men must work, cultivate, and civilize the female, virgin earth: “Just as earth is female to the farmer who subdues it with the plow, so wilderness is female to the male explorer, frontiersman, and pioneer who tame it with the brute strength of the ax, the trap, and the gun...Civilization is the final end, the telos, toward which ‘wild’ nature is destined” (Merchant 1995, 147).

In order to view the wild as something separate from the conquering Europeans, the people already making a life and culture in the American west would have to be removed and/or exterminated. With the end of the Indian wars of the late 19th century came Indian removal and relegation to the reservation. “The removal of Indians to create an ‘uninhabited wilderness’—uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place—reminds us just how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is...There is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness” (Croton, 79).

Dominating the bison, as in Hardin’s example above, indicates a mastery of and control over nature while appropriating a sacred symbol of many Native American tribes. The bison was the primary form of sustenance for Plains Indians. In order to defeat the

resistance of Indians of the Plains to white settlement, white soldiers and frontiersmen slaughtered bison by the hundreds, leaving the carcasses to rot while robbing the Indians of their main source of food, shelter, and clothing. “Up and down the plains those men ranged, shooting sometimes as many as a hundred buffalo (*sic*) a day” (Old Lady Horse, quoted in Nabokov, 175). So, the frontiersman wasn’t simply feasting on a gluttonous dinner of tongue, as in Hardin’s example, and leaving the carcass to rot unintentionally—slaughter of the bison was a wartime strategy designed to weaken the occupiers of the desired land, the Native Americans.

Hardin also references another concept central to classical liberalism, sovereignty, in his follow up to “The Tragedy of the Commons,” his article “Living in a Lifeboat.” While the frontier example is only a brief component of his commons scenario, I think it is crucial to understand the influence of the European American project of Manifest Destiny, and its roots in classical liberalism, in the shaping of our current attitude of anthropocentric entitlement to natural resources. Hardin’s articles are really about border control and the policing of the poor, on a global scale, as his Lifeboat Ethics details. Population is the problem, for Hardin, and closing the borders of the United States to immigrants is his most prominent solution. Hardin’s references to sovereignty detail his attitudes towards immigration, couched in language with a long history of acceptance in the United States.

American Indians as a people are considered sovereign nations under domestic as well as international law, regardless of their physically bordered geographical location; reservations may allot land, but Native Americans as a people are considered inherently sovereign: “In 1793, Thomas Jefferson summed up his own country’s position by

observing the ‘the Indians have full, undivided and independent sovereignty as long as they choose to keep it, and this might be forever’” (quoted in Churchill, 19). Jefferson’s own decision on the question of inherent Indian sovereignty was based on the legal theories of Franciscus de Vitoria of Spain, as well as scholars and diplomats from England, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands (Churchill, 19). Along with the inherent sovereignty of Native Americans, American immigrants have also brought an embodied sovereignty to the historical American frontier. The farther the pioneers settled, the farther the young empire of the United States could be stretched. Our cultural sense of entitlement to natural resources, I would argue, originates in this constant displacing of territorial sovereignty through embodied subjects; waves of immigration pushed the bordered limits of the young nation, with the conquerors claiming the land and resources. The rugged, self-made American man, capable of conquering the Indians, conquering nature, and conquering himself, is an American in control of his surroundings, of other people, and of his destiny. Hardin’s Lifeboat Ethics are also culturally rooted in the myth of the self-made man carving out a place for himself and his family in the wilderness.

At the time of his writing, Hardin’s Lifeboat Ethics are an argument against the Spaceship Earth metaphor, popular with some advocating an environmentally influenced shift from so-called cowboy economics (another culturally loaded term, but I digress) to what they term spaceship economics. But, in Hardin’s view, the spaceship metaphor falls short of the mark. “Unfortunately, the image of a spaceship is also used to promote measures that are suicidal. One of these is a generous immigration policy, which is only a particular instance of a class of policies that are in error because they lead to the tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 375). He then sets up another thought experiment, this time

detailing an imaginary scenario where the rich are in one lifeboat, and the poor from other countries—Hardin has yet to acknowledge the poor already living in his own country, the United States—swim towards the boat carrying the better off, clamoring to be brought aboard. Of course, lifeboats have limited seating capacities, which he compares to the carrying capacity of his commons. Who do we let on board? Noone? Everyone? Only a few? For Hardin, the solution is rather straightforward, if a bit heartless. Let the poor drown for the betterment of the rich that would be preserved—if we let too many people on to our boat, all would drown. Sharing is a misguided sentiment, in Hardin’s Lifeboat: this article is also ripe with the language of the debates between realists (influenced by Hobbes) and idealists (influenced by Locke). He goes on to dismiss two other Western ethical systems that encourage sharing, and lumps them together in what he calls Christian-Marxist ideals (Hardin, 376). “The fundamental error of the sharing ethic is that it leads to the tragedy of the commons. Under a system of private property the man (or group of men) who own property recognize their responsibility to care for it, for if they don’t they will eventually suffer” (Hardin, 376).

But Hardin’s view of the commons is not an accurate description of the usage of the commons of the past in the United States by its non-European inhabitants, or the communally held land of indigenous cultures past or present. Hardin is also misconstruing the arguments of Adam Smith, who he claims to be responding to in his commons tragedy and Lifeboat Ethics arguments. Smith sees the ethics of Christianity as a check on his version of the free market: “in *The Wealth of Nations*, the shrewd man of business was not a hero but a hapless bystander” (Bigelow, 35). Hardin’s tragic outcome, the depletion, pollution, and plunder of the commons, is in direct contrast with Smith’s

depiction of the pursuit of self-interested acts as beneficial to society as a whole, to be sure. But Smith's imaginary market scenarios, complete with the "invisible hand" guiding the self-interested actors, are just that: imaginary, just as Hardin's commons scenarios. Hardin is simply and overwhelmingly incorrect, in claiming that private property leads to resource preservation, as the empirical evidence in the case of privatizing water systems will document in the following sections. While Smith is also incorrect, but for different reasons that will have to be explored in a different paper, Hardin is extending his imaginary vision of Smith's self-interested rational actor to situations not governed by Western assumptions or imaginary interactions: the current management of communal lands by indigenous groups. In direct contrast to Hardin's claims, privatizing commonly held resources leads to the despoiling and overuse of resources in the name of profit. The enclosure of the commons of the United States was directly linked to the conquest of the American Indians and the project of Manifest Destiny. The despoiling and plundering described by Hardin in his pasture and "wasted" bison examples are directly linked to the liberal ideological justifications for private property, accumulation of capital and the takings of indigenous lands.

Ecological limits to growth and respect for natural resources as belonging to the Earth, other species, and future generations lay the philosophical and ethical foundations for many indigenous and non-Westernized cultures (see LaDuke 1999; Shiva 2002). This interconnected view of human and nonhuman beings, also called biocentrism, is in stark contrast to the anthropocentric underpinning of American frontier ideology and our implicit justifications for overconsuming natural resources. If nature belongs to conquering individuals, we may do what we wish with what we have. If nature belongs

to no one and everyone, other people, other species, and future generations must be taken into account when determining appropriate uses of resources. If humans are separate from, and superior to, the natural world, respect for natural limits to economic growth are nonsensical. The ideology of conquering nature, conquering others, and continuously expanding the range of the American frontier, rather than respecting or understanding the dynamics of an interconnected world, is based on the ideology of classical liberalism, and can be readily found in the writings of Hardin. His ethics are **not** an environmental ethics, but are actually a reworking of liberalism and a continuation of the historical project of Manifest Destiny, couched in calls to limit immigration and police the borders of the United States.

Hardin goes on to argue in “Living in a Lifeboat” that the United States should end all foreign aid and allow any famine stricken populations in the world to starve to death, lashing out at the United Nations as well as humanitarians in general. The reasons he puts forth for allowing a Darwinian approach to world politics are *by his own admittance* formulated in the pseudo-science of social Darwinism:

The argument is straightforward and Darwinian. People vary. Confronted with appeals to limit breeding, some people will undoubtedly respond to the plea more than others. Those who have more children will produce a larger fraction of the next generation than those with more susceptible consciences. The difference will be accentuated, generation by generation....The argument assumes that conscience or the desire for children (no matter which) is hereditary—but hereditary only in the most general formal sense. The result will be the same whether the attitude is transmitted through germ cells, or exosomatically....The argument has here been stated in the context of the population problem, but it applies equally well to any instance in which society appeals to an individual exploiting a commons to restrain himself for the general good—by means of his conscience. To make such an appeal is to set up a collective system that works toward the elimination of conscience from the race (Hardin, 337).

Hardin continues his Darwinian argument by referencing biology in later paragraphs, likely because he is a biologist by training. Hardin's thinly veiled advocacy of eugenics should leave no doubt as to his lack of holistic thinking, so critical for understanding ecological processes. "It seems to me that, if there are to be differences in individual inheritance, legal possession should be perfectly correlated with biological inheritance—that those who are biologically more fit to be the custodians of property and power should legally inherit more" (Hardin 339). Exactly what, then, is Hardin advocating preserving by privatizing the commons, and for who?

The biocentric view of Shiva directly contradicts the anthropocentric arguments put forth by Hardin. Shiva and others advocating biocentric ethics recognize the interdependency of human, animal, and plant life. "Well, for example with things like water, water is interconnected. Surface water is connected intimately with the ground water. You can't separate the two. Your river flows are connected with wells. Your mountain watershed is connected with the waters it receives. And not seeing that interconnectedness of water is what has led to the privatization. Communities have always recognized two things. First, that which we need for survival should never belong to an individual. It should be the common wealth. Second, it should be managed as the common wealth. Therefore, community structures of responsibilities have to be put in place" (Shiva 2002, 3). Shiva is one of many leading resistance to the privatization of the commons in the current liberal economic project known as globalization.

Whose Property? The Privatization of Water and Enclosure of the Freshwater Commons

Hardin is not alone in favoring privatizing the world's remaining commons.

Arguments in favor of private solutions to public problems in the United States and Europe are usually framed in free market terms of efficiency, mobility, and the sluggishness of the public sector (Snitow and Kaufmann 1, Laeng-Gilliat 1). “The global economic order calls for the removal of all limits on and regulation of water use and the establishment of water markets. Proponents of free water trade view private property rights as the only alternative to state ownership and free markets as the only substitute to bureaucratic regulation of water resources” (Shiva 2002, 19). The United States’ history of celebrating the taming of nature, conquering the wild, glorification of the Cowboy that conquered the Indian, and separation of civilization and humans from the planetary ecosystem as a whole is reflected in the language utilized by Garret Hardin’s arguments. The dualist separation of humans and nature was critical to the American concept of the frontier and justifications for Indian removal and resettlement, and indigenous groups around the globe are now being removed from communal lands in the name of wilderness protection. Exportation of the classical liberal conceptions of individuals as rational, atomistic actors pursuing self-interested gains in the competitive marketplace that aggregate to constitute the “common good” leaves little room for communal players that utilize different conceptions of autonomy, sovereignty, or interconnected ethics. Exportation of liberal economic policies and philosophy, otherwise known as globalization, can also be interpreted as another American mission of conquest, rooted in our historical exploitation of the Manifest Destiny story. We are, as a culture, expanding our frontier, yet again. Cultural values predicated on domination, conquest, and individualization are yet another call to Manifest Destiny, in the form of the neoliberal economic framework.

Conventional market logic says that if you build a dam and deprive someone of the water, then by all rights it's yours to sell back to them. Shiva sums up the irrationality of the so-called water market: "Water is created in nature and not in markets. Markets can only allocate water and take it uphill to where the money is. Usually this means that those who have destroyed water resources by abuse and pollution get a new license to destroy it" (Lyderson and Woelfle-Erskine, 8). Along with the profit motive of multinationals, I would argue that water's unique qualities as a natural resource limit its capacity to be commodified and sold in a competitive free market. Commodification of water ignores its ties to a *particular* place and its workings as part of a larger whole, an ecosystem. For example, residents of Las Vegas may enjoy a temporary, aesthetic pleasure from their artificially grown lawns, but is watering the desert really a "good" idea? Ignoring the possible consequences of altering ecosystems that have evolved over thousands of years seems an example of human arrogance and technological optimism that ignores evidence to the contrary at all costs. Hardin's calls for privatizing the commons are noticeably silent on the issue of individual consumption.

The current push to privatize water is a significant example of human arrogance regarding the natural world. Indigenous and communal ethics recognize the futility of separating humans and nature, philosophically as well as practically, in sharp contrast to the separation advocated by Hardin's Lifeboat Ethics or commons scenarios. The health of humans as a species is directly dependent on the health of the nonhuman world. A better understanding of the interconnected processes of ecosystems can illuminate the biocentric dictum "we are all connected" in a particularly effective way. Even a grade school science student can understand that we cannot eliminate mosquitoes, for example,

because if they are still around after millions of years, something must be eating them. Kill the mosquitoes, the base of the food chain for many birds and fish, and we provoke a domino effect of repercussions for an entire system. Siphon the freshwater off of Lake Superior, and we provoke a domino effect of repercussions for the entire Great Lakes watershed. It's not just about water; it's about understanding the parts of the greater whole. Partly because of our deeply held cultural myth of the self-made, boot-strapping, rugged individual taming the American West, "...classical, humanistic ethics finds ecosystems to be unfamiliar territory. It is difficult to get the biology right, and superimposed on the biology, to get the ethics right. Fortunately, it is often evident that human welfare depends on ecosystemic support, and in this sense, all our legislation about clean air, clean water, soil conservation, national and state forest policies, pollution controls, renewable resources, and so forth is concerned about ecosystem-level processes" (Rolston III, 37).

Hardin calls on sovereign nations to be individually responsible, and blames the poor nations for creating their own messes, like famine and overpopulation. His Hobbesian rhetoric overlooks the role of economic policies created by developed nations that keep the third world in a state of dependency on industrialized nations. Hardin's use of the term "sovereignty" is premised on a dichotomy, that of inclusion/exclusion. People included as members of sovereign nations are entitled to the privileges of citizenship, a privilege that is constructed in opposition to someone else's status and denial of privileges; Hardin titles one of his sections "Immigration Creates a Commons," in his Lifeboat Ethics article (382). But immigration does not, in fact, create a commons, and the classical notions of sovereignty (independent autonomy and authority, whether

held individually or nationally) are currently being redefined. “The postwar project of economic globalization has, perhaps unintentionally, shifted the discursive locus of sovereignty, security, and peace from the state to the individual....As countries lose sovereign control over their borders and the possibility of managing the movement of people, goods, and ideas, they seem to be focusing more closely on the new subjects of transnational sovereignty, the individuals” (Lipschutz, 32).

International conservation agencies, such as World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Conservation International (CI), with funding assistance from the State Department’s USAID program, are blaming problems of deforestation in the Chiapas region of Mexico on indigenous communities’ so-called overpopulation, in just one example of the ongoing privatization of communal lands occurring around the world. “From colonial times onward, wildlife conservation efforts have often involved the violent exclusion of local people from their land by game rangers drawn from the ranks of the police, military, and prison guards. To legitimize this exclusion, government officials, conservation agencies, and aid donors have frequently invoked narratives of expanding human populations destroying pristine landscapes, *obscuring the role of resource extraction by state and corporate interests*” (Hartmann 2, emphasis added). The arguments of Hardin fit neatly with the justifications given by the Mexican Government for privatizing the forests in Chiapas. Zapatista communities in the Lacandon Forest in Chiapas are identified as illegal, and forcibly removed with the help of the Mexican army. “These efforts are complemented by the government’s aggressive female sterilization campaign in the region. CI’s close ties to bioprospecting corporations raise questions of just who the forest is being preserved for” (Hartmann 2). Since the Zapatistas are also the most well-

known indigenous group resisting the neoliberal economic model of globalization and privatization of their common lands embraced by the Mexican government, their removal from the Chiapas forest is a politically charged act, seemingly disguised as wildlife protection. When disguised as environmental protection, this logic ignores the connections between capitalism, militarization, resource consumption, and the industrialized world's exploitation of the natural and human resources of the global South.

Vandana Shiva offers numerous examples as a stark contrast to counter Hardin's claims of preservation-through-privatization. For instance, when a Coca-Cola plant was allowed a temporary permit to pump groundwater to manufacture soda in Kerala, India, it promptly began illegally overpumping water from more than 6 bore wells equipped with electric pumping mechanisms. What remaining water was left after overpumping was polluted by pumping wastes from the manufacturing plant back into dry bore wells. Consequently, other wells in the area, provided by public authorities for drinking water and agriculture, began to run dry. Managing the water of Kerala privately led directly to its contamination, squandering, and depletion (Shiva 2004, 1-3). When local authorities subsequently revoked the plant's bottling license because of the illegal overpumping and polluting activities, Coca-Cola responded by trying to bribe the community leader with 300 million rupees.

Local residents were outraged at the bribery attempt, and demonstrated against the corporate corruption. The women of southern India played a key role in this local resistance movement. "A movement started by local adivasi women had unleashed a national and global wave of people's energy in their support. On 17 February 2004, the

Kerala Chief Minister under pressure of the growing movement and the aggravation of the water crisis because of a drought ordered closure of the Coke plant” (Shiva 2).

But one may object to targeting Coca-Cola as an example of corporate malfeasance when it comes to privatizing water. After all, people must drink water, and can live without drinking Coke products. If people are choosing to drink Coke, they can always boycott and drink water: consumer sovereignty reigns supreme in the marketplace. But along with the market push to transfer water from a publicly held good to a privately sold commodity is the bottled water industry boom. Particularly in developed nations, consumer fears of contaminated tap water and the rise of lifestyle image marketing (drink our “smartwater” to demonstrate your superior health!) have led to enormous expansions in the bottled water market. People living in developing nations have a higher risk of drinking contaminated water, and one could argue a greater need for bottled water in those locations, but they do not have the purchasing power necessary to drive the current bottled water boom taking place in the industrialized countries.

The pollution and waste caused by the bottled water industry is too great to be ignored. Hardin’s commons scenarios say nothing about the pollution caused by for-profit ventures, (he only refers to the pollution caused by overuse of communal lands) or the amount of packaging waste generated by individual consumers in the developing world. In Brazil, “Nestle is held responsible for ruining rare mineral springs in the town of Sao Lourenco that were considered to have special healing properties. The Brazilian government is investigating Nestle for drastically reducing the mineral content in the medicinal ‘water circuit’ springs by overpumping for its ironically named Pure Life brand” (Lyderson and Woelfle-Erskine, 3). And in Mescota County, Michigan, Nestle

Waters North America “is pumping up to 400 gallons a minute from an aquifer on a hunting preserve” (Lydersen and Woelfle-Erskine, 2). Notice this is underground, publicly held water, a commons, for which Nestle “pays exactly nothing. ‘It’s the public’s water, and (Nestle’s) getting it for nothing...and making up to \$2 million a day,’ according to hydrologist and Michigan State University environmental law professor Chris Grobbel” (Lydersen and Woelfle-Erskine, 2). And where do these hundreds of plastic bottles end up? After being used only once, most are thrown into landfills, or end up washed up on beaches, creating yet more plastic garbage to linger for decades to come. If privatizing resources conserves them, as Hardin claims, the bottled water industry is a stark example of quite the opposite actually occurring. It is not a “sharing ethic” that leads to the depletion of the commons, it is the managing of the commons for a profit motive that directly leads to overuse and despoliation, as claimed by Shiva in section one.

Garrett Hardin claims to be an environmentalist, but his worldview is governed by the ideology of classical liberalism. Liberalism prioritizes the rights of the individual, particularly property rights, and is a distinctly anthropocentric ideology. Countering Hardin’s claims of depletion of the commons as natural resources are the examples of biocentric ethics, such as the practices of indigenous communities. Such communities are in peril of being overrun by the nonstop train of globalization and market integration. But all is not lost, for those espousing a biocentric worldview. The idea of water rights also has a long standing Western ethical tradition, going back to Roman systems of aqueducts held as public goods. “The idea of water as a common good goes back to ancient Rome,” in the Western sense of the public (Lydersen and Woelfle-Erskine, 2). A

major theme running through the various resistance movements fighting the commodification of water and the privatization of this remaining commons is the call for “water democracy” (Shiva ix-xvi, Barlow and Clarke 229-250, Vartan 1-6). By resisting the privatization of the water commons, those practicing a biocentric ethic are carrying the indigenous concerns for the “seventh generation” into the future.

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