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The Tragedy of the Commons

By Garrett Hardin

Summary: Hardin's article is one of the most important and provocative essays of our generation. It was written in 1968, at the dawn of the environmental movement in the United States. For the first time, the scientific press saw an argument that some problems are beyond science's ability to solve. Hardin suggests a fundamental problem in the self interest of individuals compared to society as a whole. For him, the "commons" represents any commonly held natural resource: food, land, water, air, etc.

The author states that overpopulation belongs to a class of problems for which no technical solution exists. People are constantly trying to find a way to avoid the evils of overpopulation without sacrificing the privileges they currently enjoy.

Please answer all twelve questions on a separate sheet of paper.

What Shall We Maximize?

1. Are the world's resources finite or infinite? Give 3 examples to support your answer.
2. Is it possible for everyone to agree on what is in "the common good"? How should we make decisions that concern natural resources?

Tragedy of Freedom in a Commons

3. Why will the herdsman always choose to add another animal to the herd?
4. Give 3 other examples, from the essay or your own that illustrate the author's thesis that private choice abuses public resources.

Pollution

5. Give an example at home, at school, and out in the community about our tendency to "foul our own nest" while expecting someone else to bear the responsibility for cleaning it up.
6. How has overpopulation changed the rules about recycling and use of resources?

How to Legislate Temperance?

7. The author states that because conditions change, we have resorted to large bureaucracies to help administer law, rather than relying on absolutes. Do you think this helps or hurts the situation? Does it help people take responsibility for their actions?

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Freedom to Breed is Intolerable

8. How are natural populations self limiting? The article uses birds as an example.
9. The author's central argument concerns the unlimited right to breed in a welfare state. Why is this a problem? What would you propose as a solution?

Conscience is Self-Eliminating

10. The author uses the principles of natural selection to argue that people with consciences will be eliminated over time. Explain.

Mutual Coercion Mutually Agreed Upon

11. The author uses the idea of taxation as a coercive device. It makes certain behaviors more and more expensive to continue. Give 3 examples of how this policy is used to regulate behavior today.

Recognition of Necessity

12. "Freedom to Breed Will Bring Ruin to All." Some countries penalize or tax births after a certain number or offer tax relief for people who volunteer to have fewer children. Some people have proposed cutting off welfare benefits to women who have a second child. Others support mandatory sterilization of drug addicts or other groups that are "unfit". What do you think? What steps would you propose to help solve the problem of overpopulation?

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Tragedy of the Commons TedEd Video Questions

****Watch Chalk Talk Video #1 and answer questions #1-7**

Chalk Talk Video #1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZDjPnzoge0>

1. In your own words, what is the Tragedy of the Commons?
2. What motivates farmers to move more cows to the pasture?
3. Which of these is not an example of a commons?
 - a. Aquifers
 - b. The ocean
 - c. Privately owned farms
 - d. Highways
4. Explain your answer choice for number 3.
5. True or false: As the population grows, the tragedy of the commons will become more of a problem.
6. Explain your answer choice for number 5.
7. What do you think can be done to solve the problem of this tragedy?

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****Watch Chalk Talk Video #2, Read Smurfs article, answer remaining questions.**

Chalk Talk Video #2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVwk6VIXBg>

8. After the whole lesson (2 videos & Smurf article), explain who you think bears the most responsibility for managing the commons? Be sure to explain your answer.

9. Finally, is there anything we can do to make it less of a tragedy?