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# Commons Without Tragedy: the congruence of Garrett Hardin and Henry George

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AS PROFESSOR James R. Busey pithily observes: 'What may be true in economic thought may not necessarily be true when turned into unthinking dogma about other spheres of human life.'<sup>1</sup> In Book II of *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George irrefutably demonstrated that widespread, chronic want is the result of social maladjustment, not of any inherent tendency of population increase to outstrip the ability of Nature to sustain it. He argued that, by permitting greater specialization, population growth actually enhances each individual's potential to produce wealth.

In his day, as in our own, some of the most sparsely populated nations were among the poorest, whereas some of the most densely populated had the highest standards of living. Moreover, the presence or absence of natural resources seems to have far less bearing upon living standards than do the institutional structures of a society. Bolivia, with only 16 persons per square mile and an abundance of valuable mineral deposits, has the second lowest per capita income in South America. (Guyana, which is even more sparsely populated, has the lowest.) Japan, with 844 persons per square mile and scarcely any natural resources worth mentioning, and Singapore with 11,910 (!) persons per square mile and even fewer natural resources, have among the highest per capita incomes in Asia — exceeded only by Nauru and Brunei. When George wrote *Progress and Poverty*, world population stood at 1.5 billion; today it is more

than 5 billion; we are told that in 32 years it will reach 8 billion. In Busey's words:

Could there be a limit beyond which democratic or stable government would be impossible? Or some point where either the destruction of the protective ozone shield or a stifling greenhouse effect due to pollutants might be the results of density of population? Or a time when there are so many billions of people that no amount of resources or acceptable energy sources could supply their needs? Or a point of density so great that it would induce the psychological breakdown of a large part of humanity?<sup>2</sup>

George identified land monopoly as the fundamental social maladjustment responsible for poverty, discounting (rightly, for his time) the spectre of overpopulation. But impoverishment need not be narrowly economic in the sense of insufficient food, clothing, shelter, or access to medical care and educational advantages. To be bereft of the chance to breathe clean air, or drink pure water, or eat food that is not adulterated or contaminated, is also to be impoverished. To be crowded on all sides by human masses in a setting of asphalt and concrete, brick and glass, relieved only by occasional plastic, is also to be impoverished. Never to see unspoiled forests or animals in the wild; never to wade in a stream free of sewage, or to swim in a lake not choked with trash, is also to be impoverished. No doubt, with proper land arrangements and the application of advanced technology, the earth could support, after a fashion, a vastly greater population well into the distant future. But when account is taken of the quality of life, and of the environmental degradation that significant increase in population would inevitably entail, the issue assumes a far more ominous perspective.

The fact is that land monopoly engenders artificial overpopulation, whereas overpopulation exacerbates the ills of land monopoly. The population problem and the land problem are *both* serious and real; neither should be used as an excuse to avoid recognition of the other.

In Henry George's day, Malthusianism was the great red herring that diverted attention from the most fundamental cause of poverty. The fallacious mathematical methodology of Malthus' *Essay On Population* was utterly demolished by George in *Progress and Poverty*, but he was "beating a dead horse," as it had been abandoned by Malthus himself, as well as rejected by John Stuart Mill and other

proto-Neo-Malthusians. George's treatment of their more sophisticated position, while generally convincing, is marred by overstatement, and amounts to denying the population problem altogether, except insofar as it might obtain in such special isolated instances as Pitcairn Island. In the course of this treatment, he permitted himself deliverances that are truly awesome in their extravagance, most notably the assertion that 'the earth could maintain a thousand billions of people as easily as a thousand millions.'<sup>3</sup>

For this he may be forgiven in view of the obscurantist and callous fatalism that Malthusianism characteristically engendered. Yet Malthus himself was neither obscurantist nor callous, but a conscientious truth-seeker and a humane reformer. It may come as a surprise to many, and was, I'm sure, not known to George, but Malthus had, in fact, proposed a single tax on land values as a remedy for Irish poverty.<sup>4</sup> Nor was Mill in any sense a complacent defender of the *status quo*. His recommendation that future land-value increments be socialized may have seemed to George a half-way measure, and does not go as far as I myself would wish, but it surely pointed in the right direction. I do not claim to be conversant with all or even most of the current literature on overpopulation, but of the major figures who have called attention to this evil in our time, I am not aware of a single one who sees it as a comprehensive and sufficient explanation for involuntary poverty, or who seeks to use it as a rationalization for neglecting efforts toward a better distribution of natural opportunity.

At any rate, if the Georgist perspective is to have any credibility among environmentalists, it will need to incorporate a recognition that the planet's 'carrying capacity' is finite, and that, however much that capacity may be extended by technological progress or by the freeing-up of natural opportunity, its limits, in terms of the integrity of both global and regional ecosystems, may be a great deal closer than adherents to that perspective have typically assumed. The Georgist outlook has always been sensitive to duty to future generations, as evidenced in its emphasis upon the conservation of non-renewable resources. That sensitivity must now be focused also upon the need to keep those generations from swamping the environment.

I shall probably be accused of being alarmist. While I realize that the scientific community is not unanimous as to the precise magni-

tude or imminence of the ecological ills portended by exploding population, there is broad consensus that at the very least the prospect of such ills is not to be dismissed as nugatory. To do nothing in the hope of some technological miracle would be to court disaster. Mandatory population control, the only long-run safeguard against possible environmental doom, presents a threat only to sentimental and conventional notions of rights and freedoms. The movement to abolish slavery was once considered an assault on vested rights; and efforts to collect for society a greater share of the site-values it creates, are today considered, in all too many quarters, an assault on individual freedom. Self-interest and prejudice must not be permitted to place at risk the condition and perhaps even the very survival of the essential joint-heritage of the human race.

Implicit in this is a necessary repudiation of the assumption that indiscriminate breeding is an absolute right regardless of the burdens that it imposes by default upon society. This statement may seem odd coming from someone who considers himself a libertarian, but libertarianism is not libertinism, and rights that trench upon the rights of others are no rights at all. There is, indeed, a lengthy paragraph, too-often ignored, in the fifth chapter of Mill's *On Liberty*, in which he argues forcefully that the biological ability to procreate does not confer on its possessors the right to saddle society with the support of children for whom they are unable or unwilling to make decent provision.\* Contemporary Georgism must face this proposition squarely, while continuing to affirm that society does not have the right to maintain institutional arrangements which render it impossible for competent and industrious people to make decent provision for children.

I don't want to oversimplify the ecological issue. If we were to get a handle on population growth, and if access to natural opportunity were open on fair terms to all, there would still be much to be done in

\*"Americans paid nearly \$20 billion in 1988 in public funding to support families begun with a birth to a teenager, says the Center for Population Options in Washington, D.C. Its recent study notes that the average child born to a teen mother in 1988 will wind up costing taxpayers nearly \$16,500 by the year 2008, when the child reaches 20. For families receiving public assistance after a teen birth, the cost to taxpayers over 20 years will exceed \$49,000 for each family.' *Birmingham News* (Alabama), Nov. 5, 1989, p. 8E.

the way of stemming ruinous habits of consumption that deplete resources, foul the atmosphere, and create mountains of unrecyclable and sometimes toxic waste. But perhaps I am not being altogether fatuous if I dare to entertain the hope that with fewer (and conceivably more responsible) people, and with prosperity more equitably distributed, public demand might turn away from machine-made mass commodities and built-in obsolescence, in favor of craftsmanship and durability; away from chemically grown and processed junk foods raised and marketed by giant agribusinesses, in favor of wholesome organic foods cultivated with care and pride on much less acreage by those who truly love the earth and nurture it.

What I am trying to convey is that while a solution to the land question such as George proposed may indeed be the most decisive step that could be taken toward the diminution if not the total extirpation of involuntary poverty, nevertheless, although it might hugely ameliorate and considerably postpone damage to the environment, in the last analysis salvation of the environment will require control of population. In the words of John Baden: 'With any positive rate of growth, whether it is only 1 percent a year or even .1 percent a year, a population approaches infinity in a relatively short period of time ... Even a 1 percent growth rate will double a population in a mere human lifetime ... An ever increasing population is clearly inconsistent with the maintenance or improvement of the natural environment.'<sup>5</sup> For most of the world's history, growth rates were kept in balance by Malthusian checks (together with abortion and infanticide), but modern medicine has drastically reduced mortality, especially among infants, while well-meaning aid programs have made famines more likely to result in stunted half-lives than in outright deaths.

Genuine solutions to both problems, involving as they do the implementation of reciprocity in freedom (freedom to use nature without doing so at the expense of others, and freedom to procreate without placing unsolicited burdens upon others), fall legitimately within the purview of enforcement by government. As George emphasized, the enforcement of the first solution allows for the removal of impediments to the operation of the market; Kenneth Boulding has suggested an ingenious plan whereby the second solution could also be enforced within a market framework.<sup>6</sup> It is at least

arguable that with these two solutions in place, market forces might themselves curb ecologically destructive patterns of consumption.

Nothing I have said in underscoring the ecological necessity for population control should be construed to denigrate the ecological side-benefits of George's remedy for poverty. It is incontrovertible, I think, that the rapidly-increasing destruction of the Amazon rain forest (with its resultant 'greenhouse effect' upon the global ecosystem) is directly attributable to the fact that the Amazon basin is the only part of Brazil where free or cheap land is available, and this, in turn, is attributable to the fact that nearly four-fifths of Brazil's arable acreage is covered by sprawling *latifundios*, half of which are held by speculators who produce nothing.<sup>7</sup> Were the artificial scarcity of available land in the rest of Brazil corrected, as the Georgist remedy would unquestionably do, pressure on the Amazon basin would obviously cease. This is but one example, albeit a dramatic one, of the ecological side-benefits to which I have alluded. But if the Brazilian population continues to increase at its present rate, how long would it be before the margin extended again to Amazonia? The environmental advantages of the Georgist program are certainly substantial, but they cannot be permanent unless coupled with restraints on population growth. Neither should anything that I have said be construed to minimize the possibilities of technology. Rather recently, it seemed as if we had strong indications that cold nuclear fusion would give us an inexpensive and inexhaustible supply of clean power within a decade or two. It appears now that these indications were unduly sanguine, but I have no doubt that it (or something like it) will happen sometime within the next half-century. Yet would an inexpensive and inexhaustible supply of clean power save the rhinoceros hunted for its horn or the elephant slaughtered for its tusks? Would it preserve the redwoods from extinction? Would it protect the dolphins from the drift-nets, or the pyramids from the disintegration caused by tourists? It was Henry George himself who characterized man as 'the only animal whose desires increase as they are fed; the only animal that is never satisfied.'<sup>8</sup> If his numbers be not too great, these insatiable appetites can be accommodated without grave stress to the environment. But the environment is fragile, and its carrying capacity, finite. In our day and age, this is too evident to deny. If Henry George were living now,

I am convinced that he would not deny it.\* If those who would advance his cause today refuse to admit it, they are being wilfully blind, and cannot expect to be taken seriously.

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Of the Neo-Malthusian voices emanating from ecologist ranks, one of the most powerful and certainly the most provocative is that of Garrett Hardin.

In the remainder of this chapter, I propose to show that, despite secondary disagreements, Garrett Hardin and Henry George may, in what is most germane to the focus of these explorations, be far closer to each other than might first appear. I propose to show that what they have in common is obscured by a semantic difference — ironically, a difference in the meaning that they attach to the *word* 'common'.

When, in Book VI, chapter 2, of *Progress and Poverty*, George asserted, '*We must make land common property*,' he was guilty of a tactical blunder that hobbled the advance of his proposal from the start. For although he took pains later in his book to clarify this declaration, it has been used by his antagonists with deadly effect to portray him as an advocate of nationalizing land.

Actually, of course, nationalization, with its concomitant collectivization and regimentation, was not at all what George proposed. By 'common property in land,' he intended to signify the effectuation of common rights in land, not (except in instances involving generally-accepted public functions) its collective use. Neither did he intend to signify a common resource to be drawn on individually without concern for social consequences.

The true meaning of the phrase for George is best exhibited in

\*George, in point of fact, was ecologically far in advance of his time. The following passage from Chapter 3 of *Social Problems* (1883) reads as though it might have come from the pen of some unusually eloquent member of the contemporary 'Green' movement: 'We do not return to the earth what we take from it; each crop that is harvested leaves the soil the poorer. We are cutting down forests which we do not replant; we are shipping abroad, in wheat and cotton and tobacco and meat, or flushing into the sea through the sewers of our great cities, the elements of fertility that have been embedded in the soil by the slow processes of nature, acting for long ages.'

Book VIII, chapter 1. He first speaks there of a lot in the center of San Francisco: 'This lot is not cut up into infinitesimal pieces nor yet is it an unused waste. It is covered with fine buildings, the property of private individuals, that stand there in perfect security. The only difference between this lot and those around it, is that the rent of the one goes into the common school fund, the rent of the other into private pockets.'

He then turns to the Aleutian islets of St. Peter and St. Paul, the breeding places of the fur seal, an animal so wary that the slightest fright causes it to flee its customary haunts forever:

To prevent the utter destruction of this fishery, without which the islands are of no use to man, it is not only necessary to avoid killing the females and young cubs, but even such noises as the discharge of a pistol or the barking of a dog . . . Those who can be killed without diminution of future increase are carefully separated and gently driven inland, out of sight and hearing of the herds, where they are dispatched with clubs. To throw such a fishery as this open to whoever chose to go and kill — which would make it to the interest of each party to kill as many as they could at the time without reference to the future — would be utterly to destroy it in a few seasons, as similar fisheries in other countries have been destroyed. But it is not necessary, therefore, to make these islands private property . . . They have been leased at a rent of \$317,500 per year [partly fixed ground rent, partly payment of \$2.62½ on each skin, with an annual harvest limited to 100,000 skins], probably not very much less than they could have been sold for at the time of the Alaska purchase. They have already yielded two millions and a half to the national treasury, and they are still, in unimpaired value (for under the careful management of the Alaska Fur Company the seals increase rather than diminish), the common property of the people of the United States.

Although George thus illustrates his principle by means of actual examples involving leaseholds, his prescription envisages an easier and less drastic application than that of confiscating land and letting it out to the highest bidders. Instead, he advocates that land titles be left in private hands, with rent appropriated by means of the existing tax machinery. Commensurate reductions would be made in taxes on improvements and other labor products (culminating ideally in the total abolition of such taxes), and the machinery reduced and simplified accordingly. 'By leaving to landowners a percentage of rent which would probably be much less than the cost and loss



involved in attempting to rent lands through State agency, and by making use of this existing machinery, we may, without jar or shock, assert the common right to land by taking rent for public uses.<sup>9</sup> But this is simply a practical refinement; the principle remains the same.

In his seminal essay, 'The Tragedy of the Commons,'<sup>10</sup> Hardin focuses on the inherent tendency of individuals, each in the pursuit of his own interests, to overgraze, denude, and use the commons as a cesspool.\* That which belongs to everybody in this sense is, indeed, valued and maintained by nobody. The Enclosure Movement ultimately brought an end to the commons in Europe as a basic institution, but not without exacting a baneful price in human misery that might well be termed 'The Tragedy of the Enclosures'.

It makes no difference, really, whether or not Hardin believes that most people are utility or profit maximizers who value their individual goods more than they do social goods. If common property is free to all without restraint, it only takes one such person, once an area's carrying capacity has been reached, to degrade the area. As with persons, so also with nations. The stocks of blue whales are so

\*A major theme in Hardin's thought is that the genetic stream is also commons. As stewards, we have an obligation to ensure that it is not overloaded or polluted. I do not know whether he anywhere discusses the specifics of how this should be done, other than to say that if it were left to depend upon appeals to conscience, conscience would soon be bred out of the population. My personal opinion is that if measures are to be taken to reduce population size or to keep it static, then there is all the more reason why measures should be taken to upgrade its quality. Once understood that there is no automatic right to procreate, to prevent the transmission of defective genes will not be regarded as a violation of an individual's private and personal life any more than to prevent the transmission of venereal disease is so regarded. Arbitrary value judgments about what constitutes 'superiority' and 'inferiority' need not enter into the picture; the only judgments required would center upon whether prospective offspring would be likely to become public charges — surely a proper and legitimate public concern! The probable production of offspring with severe genetic handicaps would then become an option only for those wealthy enough to put up surety for their support. Since such people are relatively few and tend in our society to be less prolific anyway, to permit them such an option would not significantly hinder the cleansing of the genetic stream.

(I seriously considered deleting this footnote, since I realize that references to 'the cleansing of the genetic stream,' etc., are likely to evoke knee-jerk accusations of 'Nazism' from some readers, and did not wish to undermine the book's credibility. But I decided that to delete it would be to permit Hitler to establish the parameters of responsible discussion. Why should eugenics be off-limits as a topic simply because in his hands it became a brutal and barbaric travesty?)

depleted that the International Whaling Commission recommends the virtual stoppage of whaling, and all but two nations have ceased whaling on the high seas altogether. But Japan and Russia continue to fish for whales aggressively, and the depletion becomes ever more acute. Soon the blue whale may be extinct. Actually, Hardin does not deny the existence of altruism either in individuals or in societies. But his 'conservative policy,' as he calls it, is 'to regard altruism as a marginal motive.'<sup>11</sup> To me, this policy seems only sensible. Archbishop Temple must have been thinking along similar lines when he defined the art of government as 'the art of so ordering life that self-interest prompts what justice demands.'<sup>12</sup>

When I commenced the research for the paper that evolved into this chapter, I set out, with the aid of two British colleagues, David Redfearn and Julia Bastian, to disprove Hardin's thesis. Together, we compiled an impressive list of counter-examples, showing that the historic commons, far from being an unregulated free-for-all, were mostly operated according to agreed-upon rules that ensured a fair distribution of opportunity, spread work evenly throughout the seasons, and generally tended to conserve the soil and other natural resources.<sup>13</sup> These rules worked effectively in England for about a thousand years. It was only after the enclosure of the open fields was well advanced that the common pastures, having been thus divorced in large measure from their traditional employment, became subject to overgrazing and other environmental abuses as the old regulatory machinery fell into abeyance.<sup>14</sup> Vestigial remnants of the historic commons, such as the Swiss alpine village of Törbel, survive and thrive even today.<sup>15</sup> As for the supposed ecologically beneficent effects of 'private' as opposed to 'common' ownership of land, a recent report in the *Financial Times* of London speaks of pollution resulting from the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, deterioration of habitats, erosion, loss of topsoil, acidification of rivers, desertification, unsuitable afforestation, etc.<sup>16</sup> But this is not a brief for 'government' ownership (nationalization); there is probably no sizeable body of water in the world more polluted than is the Aral Sea in Soviet Turkestan.

'The Tragedy of the Commons' was first published in 1968, and has been reprinted in numerous collections since that date. Among the more vigorous efforts to rebut it is an article by John Reader

which appeared two decades later. 'The true commons,' Reader properly insists, 'was, by definition, an area of mutual benefit and responsibility, managed by those using it in a manner that acknowledged that environmental resources are not unlimited. Access to the commons was restricted by entitlement; use was regulated to ensure that no individual could pursue his own interest to the detriment of others. Far from bringing ruin to all, the true commons functioned to keep its exploitation within sustainable limits, thus providing every commoner with a dependable food supply in the short term, and maintaining the viability of available resources for generations to come.'<sup>17</sup> A more careful analysis of Hardin's essay demonstrates that, like my own compilation of counter-examples, Reader's attack, while factual enough, is utterly beside the point: What Reader calls the 'true commons' is not what Hardin meant by 'the commons' in his essay. The essay presents a hypothetical illustration of a pasture open to all. Each herdsman, seeking as a rational being to maximize his gain, will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the pasture. So long as tribal warfare, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of both man and beast below the carrying capacity of the land, the arrangement may work satisfactorily. But once that capacity is exceeded, 'the inherent logic of the commons generates tragedy,' since the rational herdsman, knowing that without regulation others will pursue their individual interests even if he abstains, adds animal after animal to his herd. 'Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit — in a world that is limited.'<sup>18</sup> So much for the hypothetical illustration. But one looks in vain in the essay for historical references.

It is true that, in other work, Hardin alludes in passing to the ecological destructiveness of the system of English commons that was replaced as a result of the Enclosure Movement.<sup>19</sup> In this, he may have been historically inaccurate, but this was a mere incidental error, as in neither case was he writing to establish a historical thesis. Hardin uses the term 'commons' to refer, not primarily or necessarily to any actual historical institution, but to what sociologists, following Max Weber, call an *ideal type* — a pure logical construct, in this instance, one of the four discrete politico-economic systems of environmental utilization. The 'system of the commons' is the one in which the environment is utilized by the group with the proceeds

going to the individual. It is, practically speaking, a synonym for anarchy.

In a piece entitled 'Ethical Implications of Carrying Capacity,' Hardin discusses an 'excellent report' by Nicholas Wade, which ascribes the advancing desertification of the Sahel largely to (often well-intended) Western interference. Prior to this interference, the Sahelian peoples carried on a way of life that was a remarkably efficient adaptation to their environment, with migrations, routes, the length of time a herd of a given size might spend at a given well, etc., governed by rules worked out by tribal chiefs. But, according to Hardin, the 'old way of treating common property in the Sahel' was not really the system of the commons but rather a kind of informal socialism.<sup>20</sup> It may, of course, be argued that the words 'commons' and 'socialism' are both used by him in idiosyncratic fashion, but an author is entitled to use words any way he chooses so long as he specifies what he is doing, and Hardin cannot in this context be accused of failing to so specify.

'The morality of an act,' says Hardin, 'is a function of the state of the system at the time it is performed.'<sup>21</sup> In the Old Testament period, 'Be fruitful and multiply' might have been a sound injunction; today, it is in most cases a mandate to behave irresponsibly. For a lone frontiersman to discharge waste into a stream may harm nobody; as population reaches a certain density, such conduct becomes intolerable. 'Property rights must be periodically reexamined in the light of social justice.'<sup>22</sup> In a complex, crowded, changeable environment, statutory law cannot make adequate allowance for particular circumstances, and must therefore be augmented by administrative law. But Hardin admits that administrative law, depending as it does upon decision-making by bureaucrats, is singularly liable to corruption. To it applies with special force the age-old question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* — 'Who shall watch the watchers themselves?' Hardin draws attention to this difficulty, but does not attempt an answer.

How can exploitation be adjusted to carrying capacity, allowing for particular and changing circumstances, yet avoiding the corruption and caprice of bureaucratic regulators? Inasmuch as we live in an imperfect world inhabited by imperfect beings, a perfect solution to this dilemma does not exist. Yet the program of Henry George, since

it calls for a process that is virtually self-regulating, comes as close to being foolproof as anything conceivable. To leave the land in private hands, while appropriating through taxation the greater part of its annual rental value as determined by the market, would assure, not maximum, but optimum, exploitation.

In an illustration concerning the lumber industry, Hardin correctly remarks that 'high taxes on land that is many years away from being timbered encourage cut-and-run.'<sup>23</sup> But they wouldn't have this effect if combined with heavy severance taxes, which encourage conservation while reducing the land's market value. Thus the tax on annual rental value could be set at a high percentage yet still be low enough to induce retention of title, together with non-injurious harvesting schedules and techniques. Although the taxation of land rent is, of course, the method characteristically emphasized by Georgism, a severance tax is simply a different technical application of the same philosophy, adapted to different circumstances but equally amenable to determination by the market.

I make no pretense of familiarity with the whole of Hardin's copious literary output, but the adverse reference to which I just alluded is the only one I have encountered that speaks explicitly of land taxation. Conversely, in *Stalking the Wild Taboo*, one finds a glancing but favourable mention of the graduated income tax.<sup>24</sup> Yet he proposes internalizing pollution costs (and simultaneously discouraging pollution) through taxation<sup>25</sup> — a proposal very much in keeping with the Georgist accent on using the tax mechanism to protect common rights in the environment within an overall framework of private enterprise. And in a book he edited, Jay M. Anderson suggests, quite possibly with his tacit approval, 'the taxation of industry at a rate proportional to used commons.'<sup>26</sup>

But most significant, I think, is an easily overlooked passage in 'The Tragedy of the Commons' in which Hardin, perhaps unwittingly, endorses by implication the essential Georgist concept:

During the Christmas shopping season [in Leominster, Massachusetts] the parking meters downtown were covered with plastic bags that bore tags reading: 'Do not open until after Christmas. Free parking courtesy of the mayor and city council.' In other words, facing the prospect of an increased demand for already scarce space, the city fathers reinstated the system of the commons.<sup>27</sup>

By calling this a 'retrogressive act,' Hardin demonstrates his belief that the meters ought to have been left in operation. Now, parking meters exemplify (in specialized form) the public appropriation of land rent; they constitute payment for the privilege of temporarily monopolizing a site — compensation to the members of the community whose opportunity to use the site is extinguished for a given time by the monopoly. The payment, to be sure, is typically only partial. Compensation reflecting the full market value of the temporary monopoly would be at levels comparable to fees charged by commercial parking lots in the vicinity of the meters.

But more than compensation is involved here. If parking meter fees, instead of being used to pay for community services or even for their own collection cost, were buried in the ground, their collection would still be justified in order, as Hardin puts it, 'to keep downtown shoppers temperate in their use of parking space'<sup>28</sup> — i.e., as a means of rendering monopoly temporary and innocuous. So, also, the public appropriation of land rent in its more comprehensive application, by removing any incentive to hoard and speculate in land, would be warranted in terms of social justice and well-being, even if its yield were cast into the sea. For in rectifying distribution, this approach liberates production; in apportioning the wealth-pie fairly, it increases the size of the pie. Instead of being a cruel contest in which the cards are stacked against most players because of gross disparities in bargaining power, the market becomes in practice what capitalist theory alleges it to be — a profoundly cooperative process of voluntary exchange. And all this is accomplished without stressing the environment. Cities, more compact, return to human scale as artificial pressures for expansion outward and upward are removed. The availability of land at prices no longer bloated by speculation, makes profitable agriculture possible without the wholesale use of ecologically harmful chemicals and machinery.

In addition to the 'system of the commons,' which amounts to anarchy, Hardin distinguishes three other discrete systems of environmental utilization: 'socialism,' 'private philanthropy,' and 'private enterprise,'<sup>29</sup>. He tends in general to favour the last, since under it the individual decision-maker and society usually both lose when the carrying capacity of the environment is overloaded, and thus decisions are more apt to be 'operationally responsible.' Yet he

concedes that this is not invariably the case, and is no apologist for absolute private ownership of land.<sup>30</sup> Not only does he grant that an owner, seeking rationally to maximize his gains, may under certain conditions behave in an ecologically *irresponsible* fashion<sup>31</sup> (a conclusion set forth in greater detail respectively by Daniel Fife and Colin W. Clark,<sup>32</sup>) but he holds that the Enclosure Acts, even though ecologically desirable, were unjust.<sup>33</sup> 'We must admit,' he asserts moreover, 'that our legal system of private property plus inheritance is unjust — but we put up with it because we are not convinced, at the moment, that anyone has invented a better system.'<sup>34</sup>

Well, someone surnamed George did 'invent' a better system — one that eminently satisfies all of Hardin's criteria, one that secures the advantages of both commons and enclosures with none of the disadvantages of either. For, paradoxical though it may seem, the only way in which the individual may be assured what properly belongs to him is for society to take what properly belongs to it: the Jeffersonian ideal of individualism requires for its realization the socialization of rent. Were rent socialized, population stabilized, the costs of negative externalities internalized, and the returns of private effort privatized, we and our posterity would prosper, at least roughly, according to our deserts, and healing come to our abused and wounded habitat, the earth.

## NOTES

- 1 James L. Busey, 'Dogma and Population', *Intermountain Frontier*, August 5, 1986, p. 4.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (1879; New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1962), p. 133.
- 4 Two reviews published by Malthus anonymously of books by Thomas Newenham, *Edinburgh Review*, July, 1808, pp. 336-355, and April, 1809, pp. 115-170, respectively. See Michael A. MacDowell, 'Malthus and George on Ireland; Some Comments on Similarities, the Single Tax and Others', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Oct., 1977.

- 5 John Baden, 'Population, Ethnicity, and Public Goods: The Logic of Interest-Group Strategy' in Garrett Hardin and John Baden, eds., *Managing the Commons* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1977), pp.253, 259.
- 6 Kenneth Boulding, *The Meaning of the 20th Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p.135.
- 7 'Brazil's land reform program is caught in a violent crossfire', *Christian Science Monitor*, May 7, 1987, p. 11.
- 8 *Progress and Poverty*, p.134.
- 9 *Progress and Poverty*, p.405.
- 10 Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, Vol. 162, Dec. 13, 1968, pp.1243-1248.
- 11 Hardin, 'An Operational Analysis of "Responsibility"', in Hardin and Baden, eds., *Managing the Commons*, p.68.
- 12 William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (1942; London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1976; New York: Seabury, 1977), p.65.
- 13 See C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), pp.38-58; and *Laxton: Life in an Open Field Village* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, Manuscripts Department, Archive Teaching Unit No. 4), Introduction, pp.12-17, Transcripts and Summaries of Documents, pp.10-11.
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