

**PO230 States and Markets: An Introduction to International Political Economy
Seminar Week 20. Ecological crisis of capitalism**

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What is the tragedy of the commons?

(You can read Hardin's original article here:
<https://www.hendrix.edu/uploadedFiles/Admission/GarrettHardinArticle.pdf>)

How would you solve this problem?

“In economic affairs, The Wealth of Nations (1776) popularized the "invisible hand," the idea that an individual who "intends only his own gain," is, as it were, "led by an invisible hand to promote... the public interest". Adam Smith did not assert that this was invariably true, and perhaps neither did any of his followers. But he contributed to a dominant tendency of thought that has ever since interfered with positive action based on rational analysis, namely, the tendency to assume that decisions reached individually will, in fact, be the best decisions for an entire society. If it is correct we can assume that men will control their individual fecundity so as to produce the optimum population. If the assumption is not correct, we need to reexamine our individual freedoms to see which ones are defensible.” (Hardin 1968)

And

“Indeed, our particular concept of private property, which deters us from exhausting the positive resources of the earth, favors pollution. The owner of a factory on the bank of a stream-whose property extends to the middle of the stream-often has difficulty seeing why it is not his natural right to muddy the waters flowing past his door.”

...

He also writes that the problem of pollution is a problem of population.

“If each human family were dependent only on its own resources; if the children of improvident parents starved to death; if, thus, overbreeding brought its own "punishment" to the germ line then there would be no public interest in controlling the breeding of families. But our society is deeply committed to the welfare state, and hence is confronted with another aspect of the tragedy of the commons. In a welfare state, how shall we deal with the family, the religion, the race, or the class (or indeed any distinguishable and cohesive group) that adopts overbreeding as a policy to secure its own aggrandizement? To couple the concept of freedom to breed with the belief that everyone born has an equal right to the commons is to lock the world into a tragic course of action. Unfortunately this is just the course of action that is being pursued by the United Nations. In late 1967, some 30 nations agreed to the following:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights describes the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. It follows that any choice and decision with regard to the size of the family must irrevocably rest with the family itself, and cannot be made by anyone else.”

“But it isn't their fault!" Some kind-hearted liberals argue. "How can we blame the poor people who are caught in an emergency? Why must they suffer for the sins of their governments?" The concept of blame is simply not relevant here. The real question is, what are the operational consequences of establishing a world food bank? If it is open to every country every time a need develops, slovenly rulers will not be motivated to take Joseph's advice. Someone will always come to their aid. Some countries will deposit food in the world food bank, and others will withdraw it. There will be almost no overlap. As a result of such solutions to food shortage emergencies, the poor countries will not learn to mend their ways, and will suffer progressively greater emergencies as their populations grow.” (Hardin 1974, Lifeboat Ethics: the Case Against Helping the Poor).

Why / how does neo-classical economic analysis struggle to deal effectively with environmental threats and climate change?



The poorest half of the global population are responsible for only around 10% of global emissions yet live overwhelmingly in the countries most vulnerable to climate change – while the richest 10% of people in the world are responsible for around 50% of global emissions.

Why we should eat the rich and save the planet

Just kidding. Definitely don't eat the rich.



In these trying times, we must simply eat the rich
Imagine there's no billionaires

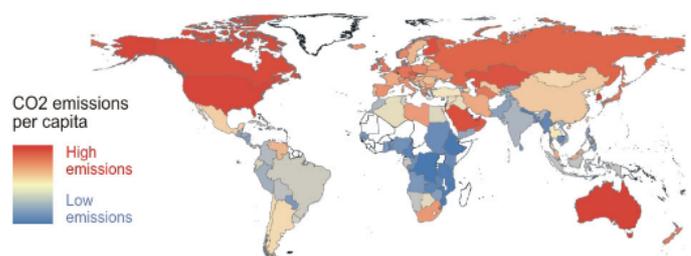
Climate change policies and the global south? Who pays for the climate?

Map from <https://anjukan.github.io/Climate-Justice-and-the-Leap-Frog/>

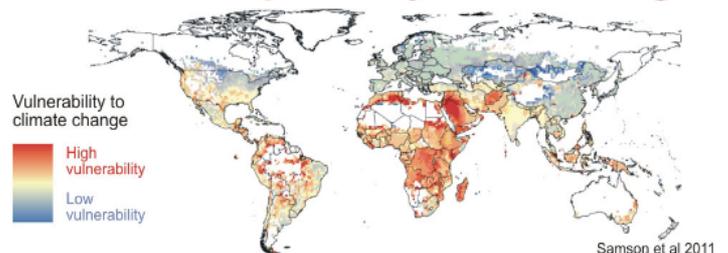
Do we need GDP as a measure of success?

What other metrics would you employ to measure the prosperity of a country?

The concept of [degrowth](#) is promoted by some more radical economists, calling for a focus on wellbeing and pushing for a reduction of production and consumption in developed nations. A focus on sufficiency is



Those who contribute the least greenhouse gases will be most impacted by climate change



Top: National average per capita CO2 emissions based on OECD/IEA 2006 national CO2 emissions (OECD/IEA, 2008) and UNPD 2006 national population (UNPD, 2007). Bottom: Vulnerability Index from Samson et al. (2011), where red shows regions that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Reproduced from [Skeptical Science Graphics](#)

demanded, rather than relying on the ability of technology and productivity gains to solve ecological problems. Growth is typically unjust, unsustainable for the environment and that there never can be such thing as “enough”.