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A Humane Approach to Population Problems

In a recent editorial in *Science* (25 June 1971), Garrett Hardin offers this conclusion to a discussion of "The Survival of Nations and Civilization": "In the absence of breeding controls, a policy of 'one mouth, one meal' ultimately produces one totally miserable world. In a less than perfect world, the allocation of rights based on territory must be defended if a ruinous breeding race is to be avoided. It is unlikely that civilization and dignity can survive everywhere; but better in a few places than in none. Fortunate minorities must act as the trustees of a civilization that is threatened by uninformed good intentions."

It may be worth recalling Dr. Hardin's earlier distinguished article on "The tragedy of the commons" (*Science*, 13 December 1968), in which he persuasively argues that the population problem is a problem with no technical solution and that it is the "role of education to reveal to all the necessity of abandoning the freedom to breed."

The point of view now expressed by Professor Hardin's editorial is one with which many scientists disagree. But the AAAS has emphasized, in a statement on the editorial page of each issue of *Science*, that *Science* serves as a forum for the discussion of important issues and undertakes to include signed statements of minority as well as of popular views. However unrepresentative his conclusions, Professor Hardin is completely free to express his views, and the publication of these views is within the established tradition of *Science*.

There are many scientists in the United States and in other countries across the world who would argue that we have hardly begun to control the population through the technology that is now at hand and through the political, social, and economic devices available to our world; that the policy of "one mouth, one meal" is a wise, humane, and valid goal for all humanity; that we must persist, as a matter of faith, in seeking to promote the human dignity of all the people of the world. Many have warned that we cannot hope to survive in a world in which the gap in the rates of development of its various peoples continues to expand—that what we need is a determined effort which commits the power and affluence of developed countries to assist in raising the standard of living and the productivity of the undeveloped areas of the world.

Surely there are alternatives to the solution that Dr. Hardin proposes in his editorial, alternatives that will be more responsive to man's concern for his fellow men. We may expect that these possibilities will be explored by scientists and nonscientists alike as this topic, which touches the welfare of people throughout the world and the quality of the civilization we seek to preserve, receives the attention it deserves in the pages of *Science* and in other media.

—MINA REES, *City University of New York*