Environment & Society Portal

Multimedia Library Collection: Periodicals

"The Tragedy of Limitless Growth: Re-Interpreting the Tragedy of the Commons for a Century of Climate Change"

MacLellan, Matthew

MacLellan, Matthew. "The Tragedy of Limitless Growth: Re-Interpreting the Tragedy of the Commons for a Century of Climate Change." *Environmental Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2016): 41-58. doi:10.1215/22011919-3616326.

This article argues that Garrett Hardin's primary object of critique in his influential "The Tragedy of the Commons" is not the commons or shared property at all—as is almost universally assumed by Hardin's critics—but is rather Adam Smith's theory of markets and its viability for protecting scarce resources. On the basis of this revised understanding this article then offers a different interpretation of Hardin's thesis by assigning hermeneutic priority to the concept of "tragedy" (Aristotle, Nietzsche) rather than the concept of the "commons." Read through the concept of tragedy, it argues that Hardin's thesis effectively asserts a rigid incompatibility between market economics and environmental protection, and to this extent "The Tragedy of the Commons" is more aptly read as a political critique that questions the viability of unlimited growth as the axiomatic premise of planetary economics. (Text from author's abstract)

© Matthew MacLellan 2016. *Environmental Humanities* is available online only and is published under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

Download:
PDF:
https://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/environmental_humanities-2015-maclellan-41-58.pdf

Related links:

- *Environmental Humanities* website
  http://environmentalhumanities.org/
- *Environmental Humanities* 7, no. 1

Periodicals Collection, Multimedia Library, Environment & Society Portal
"The Tragedy of Limitless Growth: Re-Interpreting the Tragedy of the Commons for a Century of Climate Change"
Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8225
Print date: 04 November 2026 20:23:10

https://read.dukeupress.edu/environmental-humanities/issue/7/1

Periodicals Collection, Multimedia Library, Environment & Society Portal
"The Tragedy of Limitless Growth: Re-Interpreting the Tragedy of the Commons for a Century of Climate Change"
Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8225
Print date: 04 November 2026 20:23:10