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**Review: *Living Within Limits:  
Ecology, Economics, and Population Taboos***

**By Garrett Hardin**

Reviewed by [Charles K. Minns](#)  
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Hardin, Garrett. *LIVING WITHIN LIMITS: ECOLOGY, ECONOMICS, AND POPULATION TABOOS*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 352 pp. US\$25.00 hardcover ISBN:0-19-507811-X. Acid-free paper.

Our bloated human population is devastating the biosphere. Facets of the problem include: diseconomies of scale, carrying capacity, resource limits, basic ecological systems, and human values. All of these are facets of the real world that economists consistently ignore. In the 27 chapters of *LIVING WITHIN LIMITS*, Garrett Hardin exposes the folly and dire consequences of such oversight.

In a wide-ranging and eclectic presentation, Hardin shows how the earth's resources are finite and how the exponential growth of our population and our economic activities will lead to disaster. We must accept, Hardin asserts, that zero growth is the norm for populations living with limits. Unfortunately, as he reminds us, economists and politicians still make decisions in defiance of these self-evident truths.

The book is carefully written, making good use of boxed sides to provide extensive quotations. The references listed by chapter will help the reader looking for further information. The style of argument rambles a bit and is sometimes repetitious, but the text is replete with short memorable phrases that capture complex ideas.

Overall, *LIVING WITHIN LIMITS* effectively draws attention to the overpopulation problem. The author successfully illustrates that no amount of technological ingenuity can compensate for limitations in the earth's resources and size. Judging from the age of many of Hardin's quotations, some have understood this problem for a long time. The book is useful for those unfamiliar with the origins of the overpopulation debate (Malthus, Adam Smith, Darwin, etc.). It is also an excellent resource for those teaching high school and college students about human-ecosystem interactions. In truth, this is a helpful guide for all of us as we recognize the problem of overpopulation and start learning to

live within the earth's limits. With Hardin's help, perhaps we can begin to envision a sustainable future for a stable population.

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