

Book Reviews



WHO RULES THE EARTH?: How Social Rules Shape Our Planet and Our Lives by Paul F. Steinberg. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 352 pages. Hardcover; \$29.95. ISBN: 9780199896615.

In *Who Rules the Earth?*, political scientist Paul F. Steinberg argues that achieving environmental sustainability requires more than individual lifestyle changes; instead, people must work together to change the rules that govern societies. Written in a popular style and drawing on numerous real-life examples, this book offers an accessible, engaging introduction to the literature on institutions and what it can teach us about addressing today's environmental crisis.

The book is divided into four parts. In Part One, Steinberg establishes the meaning and importance of social rules. Such rules shape interactions between people by defining roles, rights, and responsibilities, and can be formal or unwritten. By this definition, social rules are ubiquitous, ranging from the operating manual of a private company to unwritten social customs to national laws and international treaties. Steinberg also discusses the barriers to creating good rules, countering one of the key objections to his argument: the idea that if better rules were possible, they would already have been created.

Part Two delves into three types of social rules that play key roles in environmental issues: property rights, rules around markets (including market-based incentives for environmental protection), and national environmental laws. In each of these chapters, Steinberg uses concrete examples to show how rules vary over place and time. While acknowledging the complexities of designing effective rules, this approach also reinforces the idea that rules are contingent and changeable.

Part Three discusses two contemporary trends in environmental regulation: increased international coordination, exemplified by the European Union's *acquis communautaire*, and decentralization of power, evident in initiatives such as community-based resource management. Both trends offer examples of innovative change and emphasize the importance of thinking strategically about new rules.

Finally, Part Four addresses strategies for achieving social change. Steinberg argues that positive change will not happen automatically through technological progress, economic growth, free markets, or individual lifestyle changes; instead, new ideas must be deliberately anchored and formalized as social rules in order to endure. At times, this involves changing the "super rules"—rules that determine how other rules are made.

The book closes with several practical principles for action.

Who Rules the Earth? is a welcome addition to the environmental literature. Steinberg's argument is clear, convincing, and timely. He draws together theoretical and empirical research and a wealth of examples to reinforce two key points that may offer hope for today's ecological crisis: humans created the rules that have permitted, and even caused, so much damage to natural systems, and humans are capable of changing those rules. In learning about the progress that has been made in many countries over the past several decades, readers frustrated by stalled international negotiations and government heel dragging may see possibilities for future progress as well.

It is often tempting for Christians to limit our attempts at creation care to individual actions such as recycling, rather than getting involved in the messy and frustrating business of building coalitions and pushing for policy change. We know that isolated actions are insufficient to address the problem, but, we reason, are we not called to be faithful rather than successful? This book is a reminder to us that being faithful often does mean diving into complicated problems together, making our voice heard in the public square, and being an example—not only of individuals trying to do the right thing, but also of a whole community living a different way of life.

Unfortunately, Steinberg makes no mention of the role that faith or faith communities can play in influencing social rules. Given that the past few decades have seen Christian churches and organizations increasingly educating their members about creation care and engaging environmental issues in the public square—advocating for policy change, issuing public statements, joining the divestment movement—this may be a disappointing omission for readers of *PSCF*. On the other hand, it may also serve as a call to action, encouraging further efforts that are broad and effective enough to draw the attention and perhaps even cooperation of our secular colleagues.

The book is pitched at a level that will serve nonexperts and students well as an introduction to the literature on institutions from a variety of fields, including politics, economics, sociology, and business. While not offering new theories or data, Steinberg does an excellent job of drawing together existing research to offer a coherent, accessible argument about how it applies to the current ecological problem. Despite a few clunky metaphors, the book is well written and avoids jargon and dense academic prose. Numerous contemporary and historical examples, drawn from a range of industrialized countries and the Global South, keep the text interesting and engaging.

One topic that could have been discussed more extensively is the unwritten social norms, values, and attitudes that shape people's willingness to create and obey social rules. Steinberg certainly acknowledges the importance of these factors, especially in chapter 9. However, he only briefly discusses some factors that cause attitudes to change, before moving on to strategies for entrenching new ideas as formal rules. Given that changes in attitudes and rules must go hand in hand, more discussion of the literature from psychology, sociology, and other fields could have offered additional insight here.

Overall, *Who Rules the Earth?* offers a clear argument, firm grounding in research, and practical guidance for those who want to have a voice in shaping the rules that we live by. It will certainly be of value to Christians as we learn to work together to help our society achieve greater sustainability.

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CREATION IN CRISIS: Science, Ethics, Theology
by Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014. xii + 388 pages. Paperback; \$50.00. ISBN: 9781626981003.

King David was enjoying his relationship with his wife Bathsheba and their infant son, when Nathan the prophet came over and told him a story of a rich man, who, for his own convenience, had taken away his poor neighbor's one resource, a valued lamb. Angered, David declared, "The man who did this deserves to die!" only to be told by Nathan, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:5, 7). Now Joshtrom Kureethadam declares that the one resource of many poor in the tropics, productivity of the land, has been taken away because of climate change. We in the wealthy countries are to blame: our affluent, sinful lifestyle has caused an ecological crisis, an injustice with physical, moral, and spiritual aspects, and we must repent through an ecological conversion. The author is a Roman Catholic priest, born in Kerala, India, in 1966, who defended his doctoral thesis, *René Descartes and the Philosophical Roots of the Ecological Crisis*, in 2007, and is now secretary and lecturer in the Faculty of Philosophy of the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome.

A brief introduction outlines the book's message. Then, Part I, "Are We Tearing Down Our Home?," traces the formation of Earth and its biosphere—home to humanity—from the Big Bang, through the accretion of the solar system, to the origin and evolution of life, culminating in modern humans. Over millennia, agriculture and industrialization shaped civilization, and "some of the major world religions were born: the great mysti-

cal religions of the East like Hinduism and Buddhism, and the great religions of revelation like Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle East ..." (p. 45). All this occurred on Earth, "a unique home for life in the infinitely vast universe" (p. 46). But now our home is evidently in peril: the scientific community has confirmed the ecological crisis, with global climate change its worst feature. Humans are deliberately destroying our common home.

In Parts II, III, and IV of the book, Kureethadam describes the ecological crisis as "a triple cry—of the earth, of the poor, and of the gods" (p. 78). The earth cries out: Your greenhouse gases have made my climate intolerable for present-day life, with the rising oceans inundating the best land, and with droughts, extinctions, pollution, and waste. The poor cry out: Insecure food supply, scarce fresh water, and bad sanitation are driving us from our homes as ecological migrants. Growth in our population is not the problem, but injustice is: you rich consume and destroy the earth's productivity, while we poor suffer the worst consequences. The gods cry out: You fail "to look at the physical world as God's creation and abode, and to treat God's home with the due reverence" (p. 293). You have lost sight of how the whole of creation is "destined to be redeemed and transformed in Christ" (p. 324). The ecological crisis is a "sin against God, humanity, and the world" (p. 340). Kureethadam's conclusion is then a call to respond to the ecological crisis. Following the example of Francis of Assisi, "we need to embrace the poor with the same love" shown by him, and to "adopt a lifestyle that is sober and frugal, remembering the words of Jesus that it is only the meek who will inherit the earth" (p. 372).

Kureethadam thoroughly documents his statements with numerous citations from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), of journals including *Nature*, *Science*, and *Philosophical Transactions*, and references to related books for nontechnical audiences (but not to environmental textbooks). The moral and theological aspects are supported by quotations from scriptural texts, mostly biblical but a few Islamic and Hindu, by declarations of several modern Popes, and by writings by Roman Catholics and other Christians. Calvin DeWitt, John Houghton, Alister McGrath, John Polkinghorne, and Fred Van Dyke are among those cited. The book has a 14-page index but no illustrations other than a devastated landscape on the cover designed by Valentín Concha-Núñez.

Kureethadam's *Creation in Crisis* is a deeply troubling account of the ecological crisis, with a clear explanation for those without a background in science, and with an original discussion of the morality and theology that challenges all readers. However, Kureethadam implies that the emission of greenhouse gases is a wanton