



IT'S UP TO US: An Unconventional Examination of Our Environmental Predicament

Sally Wengrover

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Hula-dancing and Bronx-cheering it's way onto the list of consequential environmental books, *It's Up to Us* is an unconventional yet meticulously researched examination of our environmental predicament. It combines sixty-four parts rigorous scholarship with sixteen parts whimsy, ten parts vision, eight parts humor, two parts snark, and an entire barrel full of monkeys, just to keep things interesting.

A fresh and far-reaching analysis of environmental policy, *It's Up to Us* explains what's been tried and what's been proposed, what's worked and what hasn't. It argues that while conventional environmental policies have done some good, they're insufficient. We must do more, but politically we're at loggerheads. Progressives and moderates generally want to regulate polluters, enforce efficiency standards, and subsidize renewable energy. Conservatives and libertarians think we should rollback existing environmental mandates and rely instead on the free market and technology to resolve most environmental issues. Meanwhile, scientific journals are replete with evidence that the natural world is in crisis.

Given the circumstances, we need to act quickly, but what are we to do? If we sit around and wait for some omnipotent entity (government, market, or technology) to solve environmental problems for us, the ecosphere will likely unravel to the point that knitting it back together in a coherent, recognizable form will be impossible. If coping with one socio-ecological crisis after another is something we hope to avoid, it's up to each of us to put our own little brake on the consumerism that drives ecological degradation.

Reducing our consumption may strike many as an odd suggestion. Most of us think that if we want something and have the money to buy it, we should go ahead and get it. We've been told for decades that consumer spending drives economic growth, and growth generates jobs and elevates living standards. It's almost our patriotic duty, policymakers say, to buy, buy, buy, because our purchases benefit not only us as individuals but our societies, too.

It's Up to Us bucks conventional wisdom, however. It argues that our ever-growing rates of consumption underlie the destruction of the ecosphere. For that reason, we must change the way we think about consumption and economic growth. Given that we've been raised in societies that equate high levels of consumption with high levels of happiness, such a paradigmatic shift in values may seem inconceivable. Nevertheless, "degrowthers" and others who practice voluntary simplicity argue that their lives are happier and less stressful than before they made the shift to a low-consumption lifestyle.

In brief, *It's Up to Us* is one of those rare books that make complex concepts from an array of physical and social sciences accessible to a general audience. Beyond that, *It's Up to Us* is unique in offering each of us, no matter where we position ourselves on the political spectrum, a way to work with others to improve the health of the environment without violating the tenets of our particular ideologies. The book's prescription defies no doctrine other than greedism. And clearly, greedism must go. For the sake of the ecosphere and the living things that inhabit it, we must quit striving to keep up with the Joneses and satisfy ourselves with simply having enough.

Make no mistake, It's Up to Us is a serious book that confronts readers with dire facts about the deteriorating state of the environment. At the same time, however, it's a fun book that invites us to laugh, dance, and whistle while we clean up the environmental mess we've created.

So, why not give It's Up to Us a try? Read it once to soak up the silliness and a second time to concentrate on the substance. Before you know it, you'll be able to explain the Second Law of Thermodynamics and dance a pirate's jig at the very same time! What's more, you'll learn why ecological sustainability is truly up to us.

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