

The strength of the book is that the authors move the politics of choices and the recognition of trade-offs in organizational styles unabashedly to the center of the discussion of watershed governance. It is not something that can simply be eliminated through better science or through collaboration among stakeholders. A further strength is Schlager and Blomquist's use of case studies ranging across the nation (with maps) to illustrate their theoretical concerns and points.

There are, however, a number of shortcomings to the book. First, the authors endorse a federalist approach to watershed governance without discussing the challenges of federalism on environmental (or other) issues. For instance, how do states and the federal government negotiate differences on climate change policy or on wolf management in the northern Rockies or the management of water in the California Bay Delta? The last several decades have seen hundreds of lawsuits between state and federal governments on a host of environmental issues, augmented by more lawsuits over recently enacted federal health-care legislation. Furthermore, what of the erosion of state power on environmental issues over the last several decades? Schlager and Blomquist write of the importance of mutual consent in federal governance, yet in many of the case studies it is lawsuits that serve as the catalyst for action, hardly a venue of mutual consent.

A second, and related, point is that the authors' focus is on organizations and institutional design. They embrace a politics of a particular kind. But what of the significance of the politics taking place outside the strictures of watershed governance that serve to significantly shape and reshape watershed governance? In many of the cases they discuss, lawsuits and courts play a central role for altering watershed governance. What might this tell us of existing systems? For instance, is it not important that an environmental group seeking change in watershed management sues the federal government using the Endangered Species Act or the National Environmental Policy Act, rather than working through an existing compact or set of organizations and agreements? In other words, watershed governance takes place in a political setting far broader than the institutions of watershed governance, and this point is not fully discussed in the book.

Third, the authors could have made even better use of their case studies. Generally, the cases are too centered on illuminating points raised in a chapter, rather than the overall functioning of watershed governance. Is the system working? How do we know? Do boundaries or decision-making regimes matter if the overall system is not working due to lawsuits or declining wildlife or water supplies? In other cases, the authors fail to sufficiently connect the theoretical points they seek to make to the story they tell. For instance, it is unclear how the Delaware River Basin case demonstrates the virtues of federalist, polycentric governance.

Fourth, I think some discussion of the literature of historical institutionalism would have deepened our understanding of watershed politics. Many of the problems that have arisen in watershed management since the 1960s have revolved around the addition of new ecological and environmental management goals to the prior hydraulic engineering goals. In the language of Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, this has led to a layering of new societal rules and arrangements on top of existing laws and institutions (in this case, ecological and recreational goals atop irrigation, hydroelectric production, navigation, and drinking water supply), leading to a particular type of conflict—intercurrence (*The Search for American Political Development*, 2004). Schlager and Blomquist make several references to such issues, for example: “Each era does not represent a sweeping away of previous management approaches as much as a grafting of new strategies and policies to old ones” (p. 29). Yet they never really discuss what becomes of these prior laws, agencies, and values. What happens when the new laws, agencies, and values are placed on top of the old, creating the likelihood for significant conflict? This connects to the previous point about broader politics. Courts are often avenues used to pry open existing governance systems to admit new goals and interests. Supporters of new interests frequently search through “the green state” for laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, that can allow them to disrupt existing watershed governance. The case study of the Platte River Basin offers just such an illustration.

In closing, Schlager and Blomquist provide a great service by focusing attention on the centrality of politics in watershed governance and demonstrating the weaknesses of governance models based wholly on integration or collaboration of stakeholders. In light of these findings, they write that “[in] the uncertain world of complex social and ecological systems, institutional richness may be preferable to institutional neatness,” (p. 20), and make the case for polycentric federalism. But the next step of thinking about watershed governance needs to address a set of even more difficult political questions: How do we coordinate different agencies and different societal goals? Through courtrooms? Through policy train wrecks like the northern spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest? Can any institutional designs solve fundamental political differences embedded over time?

Living Through the End of Nature: The Future of American Environmentalism. By Paul Wapner. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010. 184p. \$21.95.
doi:10.1017/S1537592710003658

— Robert H. Nelson, *University of Maryland*

In this book, Paul Wapner writes that “the most important distinction that American environmentalism draws is between humans and nature” (p. 35). Because nature is

seen as separate from and thus “unblemished by the imperfections and incongruities that often mark human life,” it can provide “a model for those seeking to live in the highest ways possible” (p. 61). Human beings, as environmentalism teaches, should look to wild nature in order to “emulate it as a standard for living authentic, spiritually rich, and ethically upright lives” (p. 60).

In their hubris, however, and seeing themselves as free to use nature for whatever purposes they might desire, all too many modern men and women have perpetrated an immoral assault on nature—in some environmental eyes, creating even a veritable nonhuman holocaust in which numerous plant and animal species, as well as other parts of nature, are being callously eliminated from the earth. As Wapner writes, the basic goal of American environmental policy has been to minimize the extent of such human “transgressions” against nature (p. 190).

The author finds fatal flaws, however, in this standard environmental story. First, human impacts have been so pervasive—and climate change is now rapidly adding to them—that no places on earth remain outside a significant human influence. Even before modern times, native peoples around the world were setting fires, hunting, and otherwise significantly reshaping their environments. Wild nature, as envisioned by environmentalism, perhaps never existed at all; it certainly no longer exists today.

Wapner’s other basic criticism, drawing on the work of William Cronon in the mid-1990s, is that visitors to wilderness areas and other so-called wild places find there a socially “constructed character of nature” (p. 17). In essence, as one might say, wilderness areas are cathedrals of environmentalism, and just as a medieval cathedral is much more than stones and glass, a wilderness conveys a powerful message that reflects the cultural setting in which it is seen. “Nature,” as an idea in our minds, is not an independent force to which we can look for moral and spiritual guidance; it is what we make of it ourselves, sinners that—unfortunately—many of us are.

As Wapner advises, environmentalism must therefore adjust its “mission to a new world . . . Without nature around to orient one’s work and life, American environmentalists must develop new understandings of their own and humanity’s place on earth, and translate that understanding into political practice” (pp. 201–2). Environmentalism admittedly may lose moral clarity in the process. But environmentalists cannot in good conscience continue to ground their core principles and actions on a set of environmental fictions—the “dream of naturalism” (p. 53), as he labels it.

The author contrasts this environmental faith with another illusory “dream of mastery” (p. 79). For true believers in this modern gospel, the applications of science and economics are transforming nature—“natural resources”—for human betterment. The ever more efficient human

management of the natural world will eliminate disease and poverty across the earth, yielding a new era of human flourishing. Such a technological imperative won out over environmental naturalism for much of the twentieth century, but these two modern “deities” (p. 122) have been contested in the public arena on more equal grounds since the 1960s.

Living Through the End of Nature finds, however, that both of these “theological poles” (p. 206) must now be rejected. The necessary replacement will involve a recognition of the closely interlinked “fate of humanity/nature and then righting ourselves to the mysteries inherent in that mélange” (p. 218), as guided by core goals of “justice, economic well-being, peace, and ecological sanity” (p. 219). It will include “maintaining a love for wild things,” even while “recognizing the impossibility of sustaining that love in a straightforward” way (p. 33), given the undeniable reality of “the end of nature.”

As such passages—and these are just the tip of the iceberg—illustrate, this book is closer to a work of theology than to a standard political and economic (or environmental) analysis. At one point Wapner, briefly acknowledges the centrality of religious concerns, writing that he does not intend to “bleach out past theological categories” in proposing a new environmental worldview, although he does want to remove any reliance on old-fashioned “theistic authority,” with its explicit references to God (p. 33).

In this last respect, however, the author succeeds only in a formal sense. Consider the following statements relating to the tenets of naturalism: “[T]he human order should be based on the natural one . . . [W]e should turn to nature for cues to good living” (p. 62); we must “find the wisdom and humility to accept nature as our teacher” (p. 62); “we would best flourish if nature were the source of our political, social and economic lives” (p. 62); and “the nonhuman world,” as leading environmentalists believed, “had much to teach humans, and that we should look to nature for healthy, right living” (p. 63).

This nature has little to do with a genuinely scientific description. Newton was not seeking guides to good living in the workings of the solar system. Darwin revealed a natural order of ruthless competitive struggle to the finish. In Christian theology, however, nature has long been seen as a mirror of the mind of God. It is possible to learn directly about God in two main ways, by studying the “Book of the Bible” and the “Book of Nature.” Seen from such a traditional Christian (and Jewish) perspective, Wapner’s many environmental references to the ethical and spiritual guidance to be found in nature have a clear—if never explicitly acknowledged, in his case—meaning: We must accept and follow God’s instructions and plans for us.

This would have been a better book if Wapner had, in fact, been more explicit about all of this. He also does not

mention that the progressive “dream of mastery” also implicitly invokes a Christian message. In Marxism, perhaps the extreme example of this faith, humans are alienated (sinful), but the laws of economics as revealed in the workings of the class struggle (a new omnipotent God) will necessarily bring about a cataclysmic earthly conflict (an apocalypse), yielding in the end a new communist paradise (a new heaven on earth). Human beings will then finally be reconciled with their true natures. The goal not only of Marxism but of all such forms of “economic religion” is the same as “environmental religion”—to reunite sinful human beings with their much better and truer natural state that preceded the Fall. Their actual disagreement is over the correct means—whether along an economic path or an environmental path—to the same Eden.

With a few notable exceptions such as Max Weber, the social sciences neglected religion for most of the twentieth century. Many thought that the role of religion in society was declining and might even disappear. By the end of the century, however, it was becoming obvious that this view was mistaken. Increasingly, social scientists are now taking up the study of the determinants of religious belief and the impact of religion on social and economic outcomes.

Wapner, however, is engaged in a different type of project with which social scientists are less familiar and comfortable. He is, in essence, examining economic and environmental thought as religions themselves. Rejecting each of them as inadequate, he proposes the rough outlines of what amounts to a new religious compromise. Because his intended audience is largely secular, however, and might be offended by the idea that he is proposing a new variant on Christian religion, explicitly identified as such, Wapner treads a fine line. He has written a book that is really about religion, even about God, even as he leaves out any explicit references to Christian theology, to the Bible, or to God. It is possible that he is not himself fully aware of the historical religious sources of his own thinking.

Wapner is hardly alone. In the twentieth century, secular religion replaced the traditional Jewish and Christian faiths as the leading religious influences in the public sphere. With traditional Jewish and Christian conversations largely driven out of public policy discourse, they went underground, reappearing as disagreements among forms of secular religion (see, Robert H. Nelson, *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion versus Environmental Religion in Contemporary America*, 2010).

Secular religions, as Wapner sees both economics and environmentalism, are real religions, not just any idea or belief that may be very strongly (very “religiously”) held. As religious books (in only modest disguise) such as *Living Through the End of Nature* become more common (and with mainstream academic publishers such as MIT

Press), this will admittedly pose major challenges for political theory. How do we justify, for example, teaching environmental religion in the public schools when any similarly energetic proselytizing of Christian religion would be prohibited there? If the whole idea of separating church and state—like separating humans and nature for American environmentalism—is actually falling apart, what will be the consequences for American political and constitutional thought?

Institutions and Environmental Change: Principal Findings, Applications, and Research Frontiers. Edited by Oran R. Young, Leslie A. King, and Heike Schroeder. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008. 400p. \$70.00 cloth, \$29.00 paper. doi:10.1017/S153759271000366X

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One of the most central and enduring questions in the study of environmental politics and policy is the capacity of institutions to resolve environmental problems. These include such widely studied and consequential global challenges as climate change, loss of biological diversity, degradation of oceans and forests, and the adverse impact of population growth and economic development on natural resources. The problems have been with us for some time, and over the past four decades the world’s nations have formulated and approved hundreds of treaties and agreements directed at them, and also have built an impressive array of international regimes to further refine and implement the policies, with varying degrees of success.

The questions at the heart of this book concern how much institutions matter in this way and which institutional characteristics translate into effective policies and programs. *Institutions and Environmental Change* is a report from the decade-long Institutional Dimensions of Global Environmental Change project, itself one of the original core activities of the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change. The editors’ purpose is to present the principal findings of the project and to promote further study of global environmental institutions.

The contributing authors also aspire to inform policymakers who are concerned about how to improve the performance of environmental institutions, which by many measures often has been disappointing, particularly in light of the magnitude of the problems with which they deal. Anyone who studies global environmental policy is aware of the dire forecasts and thus the urgent need to devise effective international policies and programs. In some respects, all studies of global environmental institutions need to take into account how the findings can be communicated to the public and to policymakers so that the prospects for smarter decisions in both policy adoption and implementation are enhanced.