



Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy Is Undermining the Environmental Revolution

Heather Rogers

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In *Green Gone Wrong* environmental writer Heather Rogers blasts through the marketing buzz of big corporations and asks a simple question: Do today's much-touted "green" products, carbon offsets, organic food, biofuels, and eco-friendly cars and homes really work? Implicit in efforts to go green is the promise that global warming can be stopped by swapping out dirty goods for "clean" ones. But can earth-friendly products really save the planet?

This narrative explores how the most readily available solutions to environmental crisis may be disastrously off the mark. Rogers travels the world tracking how the conversion from a "petro" to a "green" society affects the most fundamental aspects of life, food, shelter, and transportation. Reporting from some of the most remote places on earth, Rogers uncovers shocking results that include massive clear-cutting, destruction of native ecosystems, and grinding poverty. Relying simply on market forces, people with good intentions wanting to just "do something" to help the planet are left feeling confused and powerless.

Green Gone Wrong reveals a fuller story, taking the reader into forests, fields, factories, and boardrooms around the world to draw out the unintended consequences, inherent obstacles, and successes of eco-friendly consumption. What do the labels "USDA Certified Organic" and "Fair Trade" really mean on a vast South American export-driven organic farm? A superlow-energy "eco-village" in Germany's Black Forest demonstrates that green homes dramatically shrink energy use, so why aren't we using this technology in America? The decisions made in Detroit's executive suites have kept Americans driving gas-guzzling automobiles for decades, even as U.S. automakers have European models that clock twice the mpg. Why won't they sell these cars domestically? And what does carbon offsetting really mean when projects can so easily fail? In one case thousands of trees planted in drought-plagued Southern India withered and died, releasing any CO₂ they were meant to neutralize.

Green Gone Wrong speaks to anyone interested in climate change and the future of the natural world, as well as those who want to act but are caught not knowing who, or what, to believe to protect the planet.

Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy Is Undermining the Environmental Revolution Details

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From Reader Review Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy Is Undermining the Environmental Revolution for online ebook

Daniel Burton-Rose says

This looks great!

Lori says

Phew...took me a few months but I finally finished. The cynic in me is cheering that someone finally researched the questions I've always had about so called 'green' solutions. Of course, her investigations don't have to indicate how things are everywhere, but it certainly gives one pause. And makes me want to promise to never, ever, ever buy organic sugar or use biodiesel! Not a quick or easy read but incredibly interesting and one that I'm glad I read.

LibraryCin says

3.5 stars

In this book, the author assumes that global warming is happening. What she is looking at, here, is some of the things we have been trying to do to mitigate global warming, so our intentions are good, but those things are being "twisted" in some way or just really aren't useful in doing what we want them to do, after all.

The book is divided into three sections: Food, Shelter and Transportation. Organic food standards are so watered down and small farmers (who we really think of as being organic farmers) are not able to get the official certification due to hoops and cost. There are villages/areas in Germany where houses were built so that everything is meant to be green/sustainable. When it comes to transportation, she looks at biofuels (forests are being clearcut to make way for monocropping for biofuels), hybrid and electric vehicles, and carbon offsets.

Very interesting. Some is stuff I've heard about, some not. A bit disheartening, though, when we are trying to do right by our planet. She does, however, end with ways that everyone (governments, businesses, NGOs, farmers, people in general) can work together to make things happen to help.

Martina says

Book starts with several examples, from biofuels to buying offset carbon emissions to swiftly and decisively kick "natural capitalism" down once and for all.

Sus says

A quick easy read that would be a good introduction to the idea and critiques of green capitalism. My favorite part was the middle section that discussed various sustainable living arrangements in Germany which were a nice example of alternatives to American car-based urban arrangements.

Ramin says

This is an interesting book, and definitely worth reading. In each chapter of *Green Gone Wrong*, Heather Rogers documents the successes and failures of common attempts of "going green" (or greenwashing, as it turns out). There are chapters on organic and fair trade certifications, eco-architecture, biodiesel fuels, hybrid vehicles, and carbon offsets. In each case, many purported solutions to major environmental (and social) problems turn out to be very different than the proponents' claims. Rogers visits the factories where particular vehicles are built, and the sites of carbon offset programs, and the places receiving organic and fair trade labels, and in practice she finds that the claimed benefits of these things aren't always fulfilled.

The introduction and last few chapters are interesting too. She argues that business-as-usual consumerism, for example by simply changing light bulbs and buying Priuses, won't solve deep and widespread problems of environmental degradation and climate change. On the other hand, she applies her same practical criticisms to more radical proposed solutions, and finds that these may be insufficient as well. In the end, of course, there are no easy solutions. Nonetheless, we need to start with public engagement and political will, and with educating ourselves and each other. We should also become more aware of the connections between the environment and society in both the short- and long-term.

Michelle says

Well. Saw this author on "Stossel" and was interested enough, even knowing that we'd have some differences, to pick the book up at the library. I appreciate the author for the work that she has done to trace whether the "green" movement is really doing much good. (Answer: A lot of it isn't.) For example, she shows how organic, Fair Trade businesses really aren't following rules that would improve the environment. The push for biofuels is causing massive deforestation in Indonesia. The Prius isn't exactly an environmental panacea. And carbon offsets are a joke. So I am appreciative of her research. As expected, I have a number of differences with Rogers. First of all, I wish she'd take an economics class or two and learn to distinguish between "free markets" and government intervention. She frequently described a mess, partially caused by government, labels it a "market failure" and issues a call for . . . surprise, more government. She does a really good job reporting on "beyond organic" small family farms in New York, shows that their livelihood is in jeopardy, discusses the effect of USDA and other regulations and how much it costs them, then labels the difficulty a market failure and calls for more government regulation and support--when USDA rules and stupid farm subsidy rules got them into the mess in the first place. She also goes to great lengths to show how big businesses in bed with governments here and abroad in Paraguay are making "certified organic" certifications virtually meaningless. Later in the book she lauds cooperative, free associations instead of government certifications. But she still thinks the "certified organic" government certification is a market failure and more government is needed instead. ??? To my disappointment, she also does not really examine the total idiocy of the ethanol requirements in this country--she does touch briefly on the effect of driving up food prices, but does not come to, say, Iowa where I live and investigate the effects of increasing

monoculture, more water use, more fertilizer and pesticide runoff in the corn belt, OR the issue that biofuels are LESS efficient than gas and so even if it's "green" you need MORE of it, and in the end, probably MORE carbon is being released than if we just used gas. Sigh. Still, the book is valuable for the research into why the good we THINK we are doing isn't really saving the planet, and isn't going to. Too bad our policy makers will likely pay no attention.

Dawn Ellis says

Part of my thesis research. I do find that so often green solutions involve buying something new and not re-using, recycling or reducing.

Fleece says

not as in depth as i'd like but still informative enough with the issues it chose and the examples illustrating them. written more than five years ago now though, it'll be interesting to research follow-up--

especially interesting considering that in my ceqa class carbon credits to offset emissions were a pretty big deal, and of course i didn't think they'd be that effective but they're put into a lot of analysis probably without checking the actually efficacy of the credits like this book does

Irina says

Excellent, lucid and well-researched analysis of the netherworld of "green capitalism" that's sprung up in the absence of an actual energy policy. It's a complicated story, but well worth the effort. Recommended for those who suspect it's not really that bad, as well as those who know it is (you don't know how bad).

Camille McCarthy says

Heather Rogers does a great job of examining different "Green" economies and pointing out how our capitalist, for-profit system undermines the ecological benefits we should be reaping from these projects and technologies. It points out that a lot of these "carbon neutralizing" projects you can pay into don't actually get off the ground or do much of what they say, that palm oil and corn for ethanol are cutting down forests in Indonesia in the name of "Green" energy, that growing organic in South America sometimes means cutting down the Amazon, while farmers who go above and beyond the organic standards often can't make ends meet or don't get certified as "organic" because the overhead is so high for that process.

I appreciated her to-the-point analysis and that she kept the book pretty short, so that the reader didn't lose sight of her ultimate conclusions. She is one of the few writers that focus on environmental issues from the point of view of economics and how that plays a factor, and I greatly admire her for that.

Ian James says

A good investigation and analysis of some pretty catastrophic failures of the Green environmental revolution. It clearly points out how trying to modify "free market" forces towards less destructive practices fails, primarily because of weak regulation, overly reliant on for-profit 3rd-party certifiers, laws written by large corporations, and corruption of governments by corporate money and influence.

While it is unsettling to discover that the Paraguayan sugar I buy from Costco is exploitative of small farmers and very far from being truly Organic, along with many other disturbing truths, it is very good to know these truths.

It is good to know that there are still many good options. It is also good to know that my solar panels, my electric car, my purchase of renewable energy from my local utility, are actually effective (although of course we will have to do much more than that).

Also, a straight Carbon Tax still looks good (much better than Cap & Trade). I am rooting for I-732 in Washington state (<http://CarbonWA.org>)

Colin Cox says

In the opening pages of *Green Gone Wrong*, Heather Rogers interrogates the efficacy of contemporary green markets when she writes, "The new naturalists don't reject the free market for its reckless degradation of the air, water, and soil as their forbearers did. Instead, they aspire to turn the forces of economic growth and development away from despoliation and toward regeneration. Couched in optimism that springs from avoiding conflict, the current approach asks why taking care of ecosystems must entail a Spartan doing without when saving the planet can be fun and relatively easy." Rather than moving beyond capitalism to address what many agree is a clear and present ecological danger, progressive contemporary consumers turn to capitalist markets to fix this problem. In effect, they support a synthesis of ecological hand-wringing with the capitalist injunction toward profit and accumulation. The irony is unmistakably apparent. While the industrial revolution and the post-revolution markets that followed created the conditions for material prosperity for a vast number of people, they simultaneously engaged in ecologically destructive practices that ravished our planet while failing to recognize the unavoidable costs of those practices.

However, should we be so hard on them? Should they have known better? The latter of those questions obscures the single, guiding principle at the root of capitalism: accumulation. Capitalism is a system that is tricky to check, but the very notion of checking capitalism is anathema to how it functions. Therefore, it is deeply troubling to see contemporary environmentalists turn to capitalism instead of turning away from it (or moving beyond it). This dynamic is the question at the core of Rogers' book whether she is writing about hybrid cars or perishable goods like food and coffee. How, for example, do Organic labels and Fair Trade seals "obscure ongoing destructive practices," even as these "trust market" emblems seemingly confirm capitalism's move toward morally-inclined practices? As these gestures suggest, accumulation is not capitalism's only game; willful obscurantism is necessary as well, and that is what this eco-friendly turn within capitalism represents.

Rogers is quick to highlight how these problems are not the exclusive purview of capitalist markets; governments are in on the game as well. The HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point), for example, "Introduces procedures that, when carried out well, could improve food safety," but, "the regulations were shaped by and for industrial-scale processors to the detriment of their small-scale competitors." While it is not unique to acknowledge that government regulations too often benefit large-scale capitalist markets,

Rogers suggests that supporting robust government programs, as an anecdote to capitalism, also needs to include a thorough reevaluation of regulatory practices. For now, fixing ecological problems can only work if we fix the regulatory infrastructure that encourages a particular sort of market of a particular scale.

Near the conclusion of *Green Gone Wrong*, Rogers meditates on what she learned during her research: “What I learned is that the outcome of industrial organic, commodity biofuels, and CO2 offsetting isn’t authentic protection and stewardship of the environment. What’s transpiring is a tailoring of environmental crises so they can be dealt with in ways today’s economic and political structure deem least threatening to the status quo.” Rogers stresses the degree to which these capitalist injunctions continue to dominate the terms of discourse later in this chapter when she writes, “Even as big automakers mass-produce eco-friendly machines...technologies that are least profitable, whether they’re environmentally sound or not, will have to wait.” Once again, if we fail to reckon with the principles and impulses that underpin capitalism, then we will only see changes along the margins, if at all.

One Last Thing

Rogers' book is not a wholesale refutation of green initiatives. There are several thoughtful chapters about actions in Germany which aim to build better, more sustainable housing and community infrastructures. These chapters show what green initiatives can look like when executed effectively.

Ben says

Interesting, and sobering look at the misuse of 'green'. The trigger for writing the book was great many folks think thought they could be green by simply consuming the right products instead of consuming LESS.

Example: increase in the demand for organic sugarcane = greater clear cutting of forest for sugar plantations. It's hard to say that it's the only reason, but it is easier to certify organic on a new field instead of an old one.

Chris says

Impressive journalism; fantastic analysis. Rogers elucidates how the failures of "green" or "natural" capitalism are the failings of capitalism itself, and that tinkering with a broken system won't save us. Instead, a change of heart, vision and course is necessary, and she highlights some positive examples in need of support, replication and understanding.
