FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Prosperity, Poverty or Extinction? Humanity's Choices

Allen Cookson
Xlibris (Apr 25, 2013)
Softcover $37.34 (590pp)
978-1-4797-4254-7

This well-researched, thought-provoking analysis of overpopulation makes for fascinating reading.

Allen Cookson's voluminous work is a big book in many ways. In addition to its sheer mass (close to 600 pages) and broad coverage of everything from climate change to pollution, the book addresses what is arguably the largest of all issues—humankind's survivability—in a comprehensive, thought-provoking way.

Cookson, a New Zealander whose primary career was as a secondary-school science teacher, explains he was motivated to write the book when, during a family discussion about "the disastrous course humanity seemed to set upon," his teenage son asked what the author planned to do about it. *Prosperity, Poverty, or Extinction?* is an earnest attempt to answer that question—a difficult and complex one that Cookson does his best to address in considerable detail. The author gathered research in areas including food, energy, climate, pollution, population, sustainability, and biodiversity so he could write a book that integrates "science and economics in an analysis of the human ecological dilemma."

Each chapter is similarly organized, presenting selected research concerning a topic, along with Cookson's own assessment. For example, he writes that the chapter on population "is possibly the most important in the book, because the problems of food supply, resource depletion, climate change, and quality of life are all, to some extent, due to overpopulation."

The author cites conflicting research that, on the one hand, suggests Earth can never be overpopulated, while on the other hand, suggests that the planet has already exceeded its "carrying capacity." Cookson discusses population trends in certain countries, the relationship of population growth to growth in gross domestic product (it is "strongly negative"), and ways to achieve population reduction, relying on numerous sources and including several tables and graphs to depict relevant data. In offering his own opinion on the topic, he writes, "the world's population must start decreasing as soon as possible."

While the book will appeal to some general readers, *Prosperity, Poverty, or Extinction?* has the feel of a textbook rather than a book for popular consumption. It is filled with references to research, technical tables, and graphs. The research is cherry-picked by the author rather than comprehensive, so it may be skewed toward his own biases, which include supporting economic systems that are not burdened by debt, reducing social inequality, and protecting biodiversity by controlling human population growth. The mathematical formulas in the book may be intimidating to anyone other than students, scientists, and academicians.

Nonetheless, Cookson's writing is not overly technical or scientific; in fact, the text often makes for fascinating reading. The author's creative skill shines in "Futures," the final chapter, in which Cookson observes past society as if he is writing in the year 2112. Embedded in this fanciful exercise are the author's predictions of what may come to pass. For example, in 2112 the world has adopted a debt-free monetary system, every nation belongs to the "Balanced Trade Organization (BTO)," and in the United States, "exhaustion of water supplies and decline of rainfall in the mid-west and south led to mass migration to the northwest where rainfall has increased."

For the reader who seeks a penetrating perspective on humanity's future and is unafraid to navigate a wealth of facts and figures, Allen Cookson's impressive book is a wise investment.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (July 10, 2013)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.