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The Bet

Paul Sabin

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Paul Ehrlich, Julian Simon, and
Our Gamble over Earth's Future

PAUL SABIN

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Paul Sabin : The Bet before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bet:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book comparing ideas and peopleBy sienThe Bet (2013) by Paul Sabin is a really fine book that looks at the different beliefs of the ecologist and author of The Population Bomb Paul Ehrlich and the economist Julian Simon and their famous bet on the price of natural resources.Sabin is an academic at Yale who teaches environmental history. He introduces the book by describing his own environmentalism which is a very honest and clear way of clarifying his own biases.The book then looks at Paul Ehrlich's rise to fame as a prophet of doom. Ehrlich's childhood, career as a butterfly biologist and his rise a ecological activist is

catalogued. Ehrlich's book 'The Population Bomb' and his series of dire predictions and rise to fame in the 1960s and 1970s is described with insight. Sabin then looks at Julian Simon's childhood and career. Interestingly both Simon and Ehrlich grew up in suburban New Jersey to upwardly mobile Jewish parents. Simon went to Harvard then obtained an MBA and then a PhD at the University of Chicago. Simon initially worked on using marketing to reduce population growth but then investigated the assumption that increased population was a problem and came to the opposite conclusion. Next the rise of environmentalism in the 1970s is described. The creation of the Environmental Protection Agency by Richard Nixon and the passage of various other laws and the rise of Jimmy Carter and his own environmental beliefs along with the oil crisis are discussed. The book then gets to the famous bet between Simon and Ehrlich where Simon challenged Ehrlich to pick 5 metals that he thought would rise over the next decade. Ehrlich comprehensively lost the bet after declaring that taking up the bet would be easily getting free money. The Reagan presidency and Reagan's scepticism of the benefits of further environmental regulation is summarised. Sabin also points out that while the general thrust of the Carter was toward environmentalism and Reagan toward the market that Carter deregulated the energy industry substantially and Reagan signed on to the Montreal Protocol to reduce CFCs. Then the increasing polarization of environmental debates between pro-market optimists and environmental catastrophists is nicely described. The contribution of Bjorn Lomborg in fact checking the debate, coming out generally on Simon's side and then being demonised by environmentalists is added to the discussion. Despite being substantially wrong Ehrlich was far more successful in winning prizes and notoriety than Simon. Sabin concludes the book by praising the contributions of both Ehrlich and Simon while pointing out that Ehrlich was categorically wrong. He credits Ehrlich with allowing increasing environmental regulations to be passed while crediting Simon with pointing out that the price mechanism and human ingenuity have shown Malthusians to be wrong for the past 200 years. Sabin would like to see more of a fusion between the two positions. It's an excellent book that both environmentalists and others will enjoy and get a lot from. Sabin has done an excellent job in writing a very readable, interesting book. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An interesting argument for extinction versus innovation By Freedom P. An interesting argument as both of these men today would probably team rather than compete to understand the future of humanity. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. excellent summary of arguments By Pearstewks Shows the hysteria of Ehrlich's position and how wrong he has been on the World's ability to support higher total population The contrast with Simon's optimism is a good contrast. The bet itself is a bit irrelevant except as a framing of the discussion - good read for those interested in these types of issues

In 1980, the iconoclastic economist Julian Simon challenged celebrity biologist Paul Ehrlich to a bet. Their wager on the future prices of five metals captured the public's imagination as a test of coming prosperity or doom. Ehrlich, author of the landmark book *The Population Bomb*, predicted that rising populations would cause overconsumption, resource scarcity, and famine with apocalyptic consequences for humanity. Simon optimistically countered that human welfare would flourish thanks to flexible markets, technological change, and our collective ingenuity.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . Using a highly publicized thousand-dollar wager made between two scholars as a narrative framework, this gem of a book elucidates the extreme polarity between those who believe human ingenuity can solve the world's problems and those who foresee imminent doom. Sabin (*Crude Politics*) cleverly traces the ideological extremes through the careers of Paul Ehrlich, known for his warnings about explosive population growth, and his lesser known adversary Julian Simon, who advocated that technological advancement and market flexibility would resolve threats of overpopulation. Sabin shows the evolution of both arguments through various presidencies. The Carter administration leaned toward Ehrlich's apocalyptic point of view; whereas Reagan thought Simon's theories fit his own, especially in expanded energy production. The contrast between Al Gore and George W. Bush reflects the polarization in the United States over environmental issues. Sabin offers a reasoned summary of the strengths and weaknesses on both sides, but ultimately he is interested in showing "how intelligent people are drawn to vilify their opponents and to reduce the issue that they care about to stark and divisive terms." To this end, Sabin provides a fascinating and highly readable archaeology of political science in America. (Sept.) Provides surprising insights for anyone involved in addressing the world's wicked problems. Most of all, it gave me new perspective on why so many big challenges get bogged down in political battles rather than being focused on problem-solving. —Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, "The Best Books I Read in 2013," TheGatesNotes.com