

Very good paper on
a difficult topic &
well-presented 10/10

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International Relations (LPOL 3071)

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The Rise of a Green State

Economic Multilateralism as a prerequisite

In the chapter “The State and Global Anarchy” of “The Green State”, Robyn Eckersley analyzes different theoretical models for international relations and how they may relate to environmental issues. Eckersley’s primary thesis is that developing a green state with environmental multilateralism in its core is unlikely to be feasible until all states modernize their multilateral economic agreements to include and address environmental issues¹.

In the chapter, Robyn Eckersley does not immediately and directly state her argument but rather starts from discussing three theories of international relations: realism theory and two alternatives: neoliberal institutionalism and critical constructivism. Realism is based on the view that the physical and economic survival reign supreme in international relations and in fact are so all encompassing that they do so to the exclusion of all other concerns. The author describes realist theory as states “staying afloat in a hostile world”, for whom “security imperatives” are fundamental and overriding². Thus, their sovereignty is maintained through military and

¹ Robyn Eckersley. Green state: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty. The MIT Press. London, England 2004. Ch. 2, p.52

² Robyn Eckersley. Green state: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty. The MIT Press. London, England 2004. Ch. 2, p.19

economic power which defines the shape of international relations. In other words, security and economic development are the only things that matter for states. In this environment of constant threat and potential instability more powerful states use coercion as a tool to realize or maximize their outcome of interests, while weaker, less powerful states have to accept their inferiority.³ In realist theory, Eckersley writes “might is right”⁴. This in many ways related to K.Waltz perspective that the strategic behavior of states gives rise to an anarchic state of international relations. Therefore, prospects for interstate cooperation for environmental purposes are weak.⁵ Neorealism as an extension of the realist theory of international relations focuses on the structural imperatives established by the international system. Neorealism offers explanation of both the “tragedy of the commons” and environmental degradation within state’s territories⁶. According to Waltz, the systemic “unit like” structure of states in international relations brings the same systematic response to systemic pressure.⁷ For instance, domestic and collective problems are often simply ignored by states at the international level. While states are not necessarily opposed to cooperation, they might do it only in two situations: if they are looking for absolute gains⁹ compared with other states, or if environmental/global issue is a direct threat¹⁰ to the state’s own integrity and/or reduction of their material capabilities versus other states. Both versions of the realist framework subscribe to a rather simple notion of power: military and economic power as the sole manifestations of a state’s power. In essence, realism

³ Robyn Eckersley. *Green state: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty*. The MIT Press. London, England 2004. Ch. 2, p.37

⁴ *ibid.* p.23

⁵ *ibid.* p.21

⁶ *ibid.* p. 22

⁷ *ibid.* p. 22

⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*: University of California. Berkeley. Ch. 5 p. 42

⁹ *ibid.* p. 28

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 22

and neorealism focus on the coercive and material nature of power, whether that material is military or economic in nature. It is also important to note that the use of natural resources has a direct impact on the economic power a state can project. The exploitation of natural resources for either internal benefit or international trade often has a direct and negative impact on the ecology of that state. The harvesting of timber for local building or agriculture, or the production of oil for internal use or international trade often brings long term and negative environmental impact.

Rational theory is more complex and consists of three views that are more pragmatic and optimistic compared to realist and neorealist perspectives. While security and material capabilities are important bases of the state's structure in liberalist perspectives, environmental multilateralism could coexist and even benefit states' survival and legitimacy.¹¹ Specifically, Eckersley describes the rational model of states' actions in international relations as seeking not just military and economic power, the bases of physical and economic security, but as also seeking legitimacy for their actions. In seeking that legitimacy, the rationalist view may, but does not require environmental issues to be a part of that legitimacy.

Similarly, neoliberal institutionalism may support environmental multilateralism, however Eckersley does not offer a framework for understanding it at a deeper structural level. Neoliberal institutionalism is useful from a theoretical perspective in analyzing how cooperation is facilitated, rather than as a specific model for a state's motivations. Neoliberal institutionalism subscribes to the notion that states react to the anarchic international environment in similar,

¹¹ Robyn Eckersley. *Green state: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty*. The MIT Press. London, England 2004. Ch. 2, p.29

predictable ways based on rational analysis. As a rationalist theory, neoliberalism takes utility-maximization as the underlying motivation behind most state-based action.¹²

Critical constructivism offers multilateralism as a method to expand the roles and identities of states using ecological stewardship. Eckersley seems to primarily support critical constructivism as a methodology to prioritize both material as well as normative features of the international system¹³. This method of prioritizations provides a major difference to other rationalist theories of International Relations. In addition, constructivism is different from conventional theories of international relations in the way it treat the structure of relationships between states. In contrast to neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism, which analyze international relations through the structural parameters set by the international system, constructivists allow for a more dynamic notion of structure, highlighting the interrelationship between social structure and social agents¹⁴. Thus, states react to a predetermined structure by identifying the nature of that structure based on social and intersubjective meanings.

While the main goal of this chapter is not to completely reject realist view, but strongly points out its weaknesses and suggests alternate theories that might provide a framework for environmental issues to be part of the decision process and function of states actions in the international order. The author's thesis, which she reserves until the conclusion of the paper, is that tying environmental issues to economic multilateral agreements may be the only way for a Green State to emerge.

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¹² Robyn Eckersley. Green state: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty. The MIT Press. London, England 2004. Ch. 2, p. 29

¹³ ibid. p. 51

¹⁴ ibid. p. 24

One of the ideas that the author does not explore is that alternate concerns of state governance could be included in the framework she supports. For example, a state may choose to tie human rights to its economic international agreements, or any other seemingly non-realist concerns for that matter. Eckersley does not provide a specific framework for prioritization of environmental concerns above other non-realist ones. There is a legitimate case to be made for human rights being more important than environmental factors for some states, and therefore important enough to be included as an economic or physical security issue¹⁵. For South Korea, human rights issues in North Korea could have a direct effect on its territorial security through collapse of the state and refugees. Refugees may also have a direct economic impact, through the cost it would take to support relief efforts and assimilation of a meaningful number of people. It is for this reason that South Korea may tie human rights issues to its economic multilateral agreements, and not just as part of the discourse of “other”, i.e. less important issues. Eckersley correctly describes environmental issues as potentially having a long term impact on the physical and economic security of a state. Eckersley’s presentation lacks a model for how environmental concerns might rise to that level, nor does she account for the long lead time of environmental issues to become an immediate threat and the ability for states to change direction when needed. Debate over whether environmental issues may pass the point of no return before reprioritization is beyond the scope of both this paper and Eckersley’s referenced chapter, however it most certainly needs to be included in a states calculus prior to raising environmental issues to the level of physical and economic security.

One event that supports Eckersley’s thesis is the recent GMO ban in Europe passed on January 13th¹⁶. In the ban, crops that were genetically modified could not enter the Europe if the

¹⁵ <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2015/01/236316.htm>

¹⁶ <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21639578-eu-lifts-its-ban-gm-crops-gently-modified>

E.U. had placed a ban on that specific crop. Starting from this spring each country will be able to impose its own restrictions. Taking this example further and applying it as part of the critical constructionist view, we can clearly see the combination of environmental and economic drivers of policy. There is also a direct impact. Production and distribution of genetically modified food is a primary source of economic development for some countries, such as Mexico, but are at the same time an environmental threat. The threat comes from the pesticides and potential impact of genetic modification. The economic impact of banning GMOs is a direct negative on countries like Mexico, but a potential benefit to European farmers that have developed alternative methods of production.¹⁷ Adhering to GMO modified food trade as an ecological matter, or as a health concern¹⁸, would not probably not lead to its prioritization as part of the international dialogue.

Works cited

- 1) Kenneth N. Waltz. Theory of International Politics: University of California. Berkeley
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¹⁷ <http://www.stopthecrop.org/sustainable-alternatives>

¹⁸ http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/cfs_trade_matters_76070.pdf

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