

Global Environmental Politics

- The field of environmental politics (Ecopolitics)
 - Just like Environmental Economics was a sub discipline of Economics, Environmental Politics is a sub-discipline of Political Science
 - One of the key theories of political science as a discipline is political realism, which posits that international diplomacy is dominated by nation-states who compete for their interest in a zero-sum games
 - Nation-states important players that fight each other ==> fight for their own interest at the expense of others
 - How can we make almost 200 countries sign and enforce viable environmental treaties in this context?
 - The goal of environmental politics is to provide analytical tools to make sense of public policy-making in the realm of environmental issues, and the understand the forces at play in international flora
 - How can we reconcile environmental concerns and the lawless international political landscape?
- The tragedy of the Commons
 - Private interest at odds with the one of the group
 - The term was first used by William Foster Lloyd in 1833 to describe overgrazing in medieval English “Commons”
 - Land was overgrazed
 - The concept became much more popular when reformulated in a 1968 article, “The Tragedy of the Commons” by Garrett Hardin, as a parable for ecological abuse.
 - In Hardin’s article, the Commons doesn’t just refer to communal grazing grounds, but acts as a metaphor for any shared and unregulated resources
 - What can such a Commons be?
 - Health Care
 - Atmosphere
 - Oceans (and fish stocks)
 - Rivers and Lakes
 - Not just environment! Public roads, work refrigerator, cleanliness of shared bathroom
 - The Bottom of the Well
 - Push Farmers to grow nuts
 - Farmers grow profitable crops (like nuts)
 - Droughts of pistachios so the price goes up
 - Go deeper and deeper to get water ==> aquifers
 - Using equipment to pump oil to feed pistachios
 - Are there solutions to prevent this tragedy?
 - An active branch of political science and political philosophy is trying to propose various solutions to this problem
 - Traditionally, two types of solutions to this problem:
 - Privatization
 - The preferred solution of libertarian political scientists and economists, the simplest solution is to privatize the commons
 - Problem: can’t privatize air
 - This provides incentive to new owner to exploit sustainably
 - While this works for simple types of commons, this poses obvious difficulties for the world’s atmosphere, ocean...
 - Regulation
 - Works especially well within a single country: fishing permits, emissions limits, standards, bans, etc
 - More difficult with international problems: difficult for all countries to agree on common rule, and how to enforce
 - Countries need to voluntarily agree can't force them

- The problem of Collective Action
 - Another key analytical tool of ecopolitics is the theory of collective action
 - Humans collaborate to reach common goals
 - This field of study originated with Mancur Olson's 1965 book "The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups"
 - This theory describes the situation when groups of people (or companies or countries) all desire the same goal, and must act collectively to attain it
 - Ex: OPEC ==> countries sell less to drive price up, but one country takes advantage of high prices and sell a lot so then all countries do the same and prices drop
 - Group assignments
 - According to Olson, rational choice leads to situations where individuals with more resources will carry a higher burden in the provision of the public good than poorer ones. Poorer individuals will usually have little choice but to opt for there free rider strategy i.e they will attempt to benefit from the public good without contributing to its provision. This may also encourage the under-production of the public good.
 - People benefit from a public good without contributing to it
 - Belling the cat ==> rats want to put bell on cat so they can hear it coming but no one wants to do it
 - The Prisoner's dilemma: Blame the other for the crime ==> people always choose the selfish choice that will advantage them
 - So how does this translate to environmental issues
 - Of course, everybody wants global agreements that reduce emissions, and deals with global warming, but who will actually take the necessary steps?
 - Easy example: Canada and the Kyoto Protocol:
 - Canada was a key contributor to pushing for the adoption of the Protocol in Kyoto in 1997
 - This Agreement called for all countries to reduce their emissions in comparison to the baseline year of 1990, by 2012
 - For Canada, the agreed target was -6%
 - What happened then?
 - It took 5 years (until 2002) for Parliament to ratify the treaty, even if there was no significant opposition to it at the time
 - By 2009, emissions were 17% above the 1990 level, and have continued to increase ever since
- The problem of the Sovereignty of States
 - On the international stage, Sovereignty is the principal attribute of independent countries
 - Sovereignty: Freedom from external control; autonomy
 - Countries have absolute and exclusive authority on policies and their application within their boundaries
 - It is therefore impossible for any outside authority to impose environmental measures on independent countries without violation their sovereignty
 - Any environmental progress must therefore come from purely voluntary measures agreed upon by the countries themselves
 - According to political realism, international relations are above all relations between independent nation-states
 - Each country is an independent actor who, above all other considerations, defends its own interests
 - What interests?
 - Security (relative power)
 - Prosperity (relative wealth)
 - Countries evaluate international agreements based on their costs of compliance and potential benefits
 - Costs and benefits evaluated in absolute or in relative terms
 - Relative costs and gains tend to be far more important in international relations, especially for economic rivals
 - i.e I will agree to this id it benefits me more than other countries for the same cost, or if it costs me less for the same benefits

- Don't want it to benefit someone else more than themselves
 - Benefits greater for them than the others
- For environmental agreements, this means that, in order to be successful, they should aim, as much as possible, to incur similar relative costs for all participants, as well as similar relative benefits
 - Far easier said than be done
- With binding emissions agreements (like Kyoto protocol) compliance costs are considered to be very high ==> detour economic growth
 - It makes it all the more important to the actor involved that this costs be equally distributed
 - But what about historical emissions? This is a key problem...
- Of course, the importance of relative costs diminishes when absolute gains increases
- i.e. If everyone agreed that humanity was on the brink of ecological collapse, these arguments would have less weight
- This stresses the importance of consensus, which is unfortunately still a major problem
 - Mostly USA, at present. But don't forget Canada was until recently one of the world's worst laggards.
- In short
 - Climate change was caused because the world's atmosphere is a commons
 - Countries have a very hard time avoiding the tragedy because climate action is a prisoner's dilemma, a classic problem of collective action
 - An added difficulty is the fact that all countries are sovereign (i.e. absence of a central authority), and value their relative interest more than anything else
- Brief History of climate agreements
 - Historically speaking, the idea that the environment needs to be managed internationally is a very recent one
 - 1949: United Nations Scientific Conference for the Conservation and Utilization of Resources
 - Information point of all scientists
 - World's first international gathering to discuss environmental issues
 - 1968: UNESCO Biosphere Conference
 - First intergovernmental panel on environmental issues
 - First time that questions of environment, economy, security, food security are discussed jointly, not as separate issues ==> interrelated concepts
 - No agreements stem from these meetings. They are purely for discussions, information. sharing
 - Were they useless?
 - 1972: A watershed year in the history of environmentalism
 - Club of Rome present "Limits to Growth" ==> book by scientists
 - Relied on computer models
 - Computer models analyzing long term trends in population growth, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion, point to possible global collapse before the year 21000
 - Said there would be a humanity collapse
 - Extremely influential, will remain one of the most important books in the history of environmentalism
 - Stockholm Conference
 - Often considered as the real "first international summit" on environmental questions
 - Referred to as the Earth Summit
 - United Nations Environment Program (Unep) formed as a result
 - Agenda: chemical pollution, atomic bombing testing, whaling
 - Raises a lot of enthusiasm! It feels like world nations are inclined to take environmental threats seriously, will do something about it
 - 1982: Earth Summit 2 in Nairobi Kenya
 - Cold war tensions
 - Dominated by Cold War considerations
 - By and large considered a failure ==> killed environmental hype
 - Greatly reduces optimism of environmentalists
 - Late 70s to late 80s

- Several large scale environmental disasters occur!
 - Chernobyl, Three-Mile Islands(another nuclear powerplant), Bhopal
 - Protest nuclear power plants
 - The catastrophes are on both sides of the Iron Curtain!
 - Capitalism is not sole responsible of environmental degradation, industrialization is!
- 1992: 3rd Earth Summit in Rio
 - Most successful conference
 - The Cold War is over! There is hope for a renewal of interest in environmental questions, free from political turmoil
 - Most successful conference ever
 - Considering a smashing success!
 - 172 participating countries, 116 world leaders present
 - More than 15000 NGOs present
 - First binding engagement from participating
 - Convention on Biological diversity ==> endangered species list
 - Framework convention on climate change
 - Start working on a plan to in the long run diminish CO2 level (global warming)
 - Meet in Kyoto
 - United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
 - Countries will convene again in 5 years in Kyoto to address climate change specifically
- 1997: Kyoto Protocol
 - Signatories agree to reduce their CO2 emissions by 5% (on average) in comparison to 1990 baseline
 - 55 countries need: Iceland joins in 2002, as 55th members
 - Canada is the only country having ratified Kyoto who later reneged its engagement.
 - 20 years later, Kyoto is a mitigated success
- Because of the problem of cheating, non respect of engagements (all linked to problems previously discussed) recent environmental summits have focused much more on loose, non-binding agreements, or simple statements of intention.
- The latest of these agreements is the Paris Climate Accord:
 - 196 countries present, 170 of them agreed to it in 2015
 - Effectively replaces Kyoto Protocol with much looser imprecise objective
 - All signatories agree that global warming must be kept well below 2 degrees Celsius, aiming for 1.5 degrees
 - Each country determines, plans and regularly reports its own contribution it should make in order to mitigate climate change
 - There is no mechanism to force a country to specific emissions targets, specific date, but each target should go beyond previous engagement (no penalty if otherwise)
 - Donald Trump announced in June 2017 his intention to withdraw the USA from this agreement