



Many Hands Make Green Work

The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements by Jonathan A. Fox; L. David Brown; Global Environmental Diplomacy by Mostafa K. Tolba; Iwona Rummel-Bulska; The Implementation and Effectiveness of International Environmental Commitments: Theory and Practice by David G. Victor; Kal Raustiala; Eugene B. Skolnikoff; Earth at a Crossroads: Paths to a Sustainable Future by Hartmut Bossel

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M. J. Peterson

The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements, Jonathan A. Fox and L. David Brown, eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998). 584 pp., cloth (ISBN: 0-262-06199-6), \$39.95; paper (ISBN: 0-262-56117-4), \$30.00.

Global Environmental Diplomacy, Mostafa K. Tolba, with Iwona Rummel-Bulska (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998). 216 pp., cloth (ISBN: 0-262-20113-5), \$27.50.

The Implementation and Effectiveness of International Environmental Commitments: Theory and Practice, David G. Victor, Kal Raustiala, and Eugene B. Skolnikoff, eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998). 460 pp., cloth (ISBN: 0-262-22051-1) \$60.00.; paper (ISBN: 0-262-72028-0), \$30.00.

Earth at a Crossroads: Paths to a Sustainable Future, Hartmut Bossel (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 352 pp., cloth (ISBN: 0-521-63005-3) \$59.95; paper (ISBN: 0-521-63995-6), \$19.95.

As anecdotal and scientific evidence demonstrating the negative environmental consequences of current patterns of human activity accumulates, more people are concluding that human societies need to reorganize themselves and their activities to become more attuned to the limits of the natural ecosystem. It is also obvious that this enterprise will require wide and ongoing cooperation: no one individual, household, firm, local or regional community, or whole society can accomplish the necessary changes alone. Defining and eliciting the needed changes before any of the doomsday scenarios so prominent in pessimistic accounts of the future actually arrives becomes the key to success in what is by far the largest experiment in conscious social change in human history.

Many advocates of change, whether involving broad questions of social organization or particular policies on specific matters, operate on the assumption that people will be more willing to change if persuaded that, in words attributed

to Margaret Thatcher: "There is no alternative." Hartmut Bossel adopts this assumption most explicitly, arguing that humanity faces a binary choice between an unsustainable "Plan A" of continued intensification of current trends and a sustainable "Plan B" of significant change (pp. 27–32 and chaps. 5–10). He describes at length his views on the ethical and organizational changes that would be needed, and offers suggestions about how individuals and groups can contribute to the needed transformation. The other books under review also assume that change must be accomplished, but focus primarily on identifying the conditions under which and the mechanisms by which large entities—for example, intergovernmental organizations, national governments, transnational social movements, and large business firms—may be encouraged to change.

The problem of securing change at both the macro and microlevels of social organization becomes even more challenging if we also desire to maintain and strengthen democratic modes of governance. These rest on the proposition that individuals, households, firms, social groups, and local and regional communities are and ought to be autonomous agents able to make choices in the areas of life that affect them. Yet accepting choice means accepting the possibility of poor choice, whether based on unconcern for effects on others, lack of adequate information for identifying and judging among alternatives, or desire to avoid being left relatively worse off in the dilemmas of collective action so well explicated in rational choice analysis.¹ The authors of the four books under review take up this challenge because they all agree not simply that democracy is valuable in itself, but that securing and maintaining environmental sustainability depends on protecting, enriching, and extending democratic governance.

For Bossel, only open political systems permit the circulation of ideas and information that allows inhabitants of regions and localities to continually assess their sustainability and make informed choices about production, consumption, and social organization more generally. Jonathan Fox, David Brown, and their collaborators find that the openness of some political systems (primarily though not exclusively in donor states) provided pathways allowing grassroots movements and transnational environmental organizations to gain leverage against both the World Bank and authoritarian borrower governments. David Victor, Kal Raustiala, and Eugene Skolnikoff conclude that because the relation between political openness and effective implementation is so close, the spread of liberal governance and policy integration among liberal states are necessary for effective international environmental cooperation (see particularly pp. 689–761, 695–697).

The authors do not ignore the problems of governance by wide agreement that democratic modes raise. Though Bossel often assumes too easily that

¹For example, Russell Hardin, *Collective Action* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

differences in opinion will not be great enough to cause serious tensions among different groups within a particular regional or local community, contributors to both the Fox and Brown and the Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff books identify and analyze some of the tensions that can develop when local groups are divided among themselves and/or the needs and interests of the entities who are targets of regulation diverge from those of the entities affected by the targets' activity. Fox's and Brown's discussions of defining the term "accountability" and determining to whom a decisionmaker or an organization should be held accountable (pp. 12–17 and chap. 12) are models of logical analysis offering much to those who want to foster greater openness and participation in the formulation and evaluation of policy initiatives.

Successfully making human societies ecologically sustainable is a highly challenging task requiring initiatives in all aspects of the policy process: (1) developing and diffusing ideas and assumptions that inform actors' perceptions of the situation, their self-interest, and the relative attractiveness of alternate choices and outcomes; (2) bringing new concerns or problems to general attention through formal and informal mechanisms of agenda-setting; (3) considering and selecting among proposals using the rules and practices of decisionmaking; (4) carrying out the selected proposals through formal and informal mechanisms of implementation; (5) monitoring conduct and assessing its environmental impact; and (6) redesigning policies as indicated by implementation failures, ongoing environmental impact assessment, or additional knowledge about the environment and the pathways of human-environment interaction.

The policy process begins with ideas because all patterns of social organization and policy rest on ideas: ideas about how the physical world and human social dynamics work, ideas about what is morally right, ideas about what is feasible under current conditions, and ideas about what is or is not in actors' interests. Bossel takes up this insight directly both in organizing his presentation around the simple binary contrast between unsustainable "Plan A" and sustainable "Plan B" (chaps. 1, 2) and in maintaining that each path rests on a distinct form of ethics orienting all human action. Here, too, he offers a binary alternative, defining the Plan A ethic as an unbridled version of egoistic competition and the Plan B ethic as one of partnership drawing on the traditions of Catholic social theory, European democratic socialism, and environmental ethics.

Bossel also acknowledges the centrality of ideas in offering general systems theory as the basic framework for thinking about human-nature and human-human interactions. It is used to highlight the inextricable connections between human societies and their natural environment, to demonstrate why Path A is ultimately unsustainable, and then to guide the design of the alternate Plan B. It also provides the motor of hope that change will be accomplished in time by emphasizing how marginal shifts in behavior at particular points can

have cumulative effects for the better even in the face of apparently daunting organizational or social inertia (particularly pp. 62–65). Chapter 3 provides a basic, though occasionally overly brief, summary of the major concepts in general systems analysis and indicates how they offer a superior framework for understanding human-environment (and human-human) interactions than neo-classical economics. The concrete examples nicely convey both the concepts and the analytical implications of adopting a systems framework, though some aspects of the presentation could have been made even more useful to neophytes. The discussion of the varieties of nonlinear dynamics would have been stronger if Bossel had indicated how we determine whether a particular process involves exponential, dampened exponential, or logistic growth (or decay), or if an oscillation in which we are situated temporally is an upswing portion of the process. The discussion of how to assess the state of societies is overwhelming at times. His discussions of indicators, and the reasons why no single indicator (whether conventional gross national product or even the more sophisticated physical quality of life index) suffices to measure the state of society are persuasive, but the scheme he presents is a real challenge to those used to operating by rule of thumb calculations. Bossel is aware that his full scheme of approximately forty-two indicators stretches human cognitive capacity. He uses his list of nine “orienters” (what others might call “functions”) that any human system must satisfy and six major subsystems into which it can be decomposed to build a checklist to group the indicators. Since even this array taxes human cognitive capacity,² Bossel’s elaborations proceed subsystem by subsystem, not returning to the full indicator list until his “grading” of the alternate paths in chapter 11.

Mostafa Tolba’s outline memoir also emphasizes the importance of the ideas and knowledge brought to bear. Summaries of the seven sets of negotiations in which he participated, for example, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Seas Program and the Biodiversity Convention, highlight the necessary (though not sufficient) role of a shared knowledge and information base in getting governments to negotiate and to find common positions, and the centrality of deference to “science” as a reliable source of knowledge and information for all. In the chapter on the Basle Convention he notes, but does not analyze, what may be a fascinating case of competing issue-framings in recounting how a small but determined group of African governments sought not only to ban hazardous waste imports to Africa but also to scuttle the wider Basle

²See, for example, John H. Holland, Keith J. Holyoak, Richard E. Nisbett, and Paul R. Thagard, *Induction: Processes of Inference, Learning, and Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 84; and Helen E. Purkitt, “Artificial Intelligence and Intuitive Policy-makers Viewed as Limited Information Processors,” in Valerie M. Hudson, ed., *Artificial Intelligence and International Relations* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991).

Convention negotiations (pp. 108–116). Although Tolba notes the intensity of the discussions and summarizes the diplomatic accommodation reached, he does not explore whether differences in knowledge or perceptions of situation underlay the division of opinion, or even the possibility of a transnational prohibitionist coalition hinted in the mention (p. 103) of strong Greenpeace support for a ban.

Tolba's memoir is a tale of considerable success in the second aspect of the policy process: getting new concerns onto the agendas of governments, intergovernmental organizations, and other actors. The obstacles along the way receive detailed examination in the cases presented by Fox's and Brown's collaborators. An appreciation of these obstacles, and of how they might be overcome, informs their exploration of how far shifting coalitions of local grassroots organizations, transnational environmentalist networks, sympathetic government officials, and staff reformists have succeeded in "greening" the World Bank. The Fox and Brown book addresses the toughest strategic challenge of the second phase: how to persuade a powerful bureaucracy with strong commitments to a particular view of the world (neoclassical market economics in this instance) to modify or replace that worldview. The exposition proceeds at two levels, with chapter authors providing examples drawn from arguments over particular loan projects or policy, while Fox and Brown try to draw broader conclusions that neither dismiss organizational learning as impossible nor underestimate the obstacles in its way. Fox and Brown show acute awareness of the analytical challenges involved. They first assess the actual extent of policy and programmatic change, particularly in situations where activity guided by old policies continues to completion while new policies affect only activity begun after the policy change, and then seek to attribute whatever change is observed to particular causes (pp. 12–17, chap. 13). Their analytical discussions explain why unremitting critics, those willing to pursue what Jane Covey (p. 82) calls "critical collaboration," (i.e., more eager collaborators and strong supporters) can develop and maintain such different assessments of how the World Bank has changed thus far.

Fox and Brown's account of the way the rise of new concerns got put on the World Bank's agenda and triggered changes in policies and programs yields cautionary tales for advocates of "insider" and "outsider" explanations alike. Although some of the chapters present a simplified "outsiders versus Bank staff" view of the conflicts, Fox and Brown draw the individual case studies together to show very clearly that change in World Bank behavior has required a confluence of internal and external pressures. The controversies kicked up by external groups often created conditions allowing insider advocates of change to gain additional leverage; insider efforts often provided the information, context, or opportunity needed for effective external pressure. In short, inside and outside are not mutually exclusive; they can be synergistic if an organization is internally divided—as most are.

World Bank President James Wolfensohn's decision to cancel the Arun III Hydroelectric Dam loan to Nepal points to a lesson that Fox and Brown do not highlight sufficiently: new policies and programs are all the more likely to prevail if they can be justified by both established and new ideas. In their account, Wolfensohn canceled the loan not because he accepted the whole worldview of the critics, but because it did not pass muster under the standard profitability criteria of an investment banker not yet socialized into the "move the money" culture of the World Bank (pp. 487–488). If their version is correct (we would have to ask Wolfensohn, and would he be able to recall his thinking fully at this remove?), neoclassical criteria of likely profitability and ecological economics criteria of sustainability led to the same result. We cannot be confident that such congruence will occur in all cases, but it does suggest that there are resources in the neoclassical paradigm that environmentalists "love to hate" for avoiding folly, even while the effort proceeds to revamp economic thinking, so that it takes natural assets and the externalities of human activity into fuller account.

None of the books under review treats the third phase, decisionmaking, as a central concern. Fox and Brown note how the particularities of decisionmaking processes offer openings for change as matters have to be presented to wider sets of actors. The bulk of their discussion on decisionmaking focuses on the distinction between "policy" and "project" decisions, and uses it in two ways. First, they argue that promoting concerns for the environment and social equity requires aligning both sorts of decisions in favorable directions; policies mean little unless they actually guide day-to-day decisions. Second, they assess how much World Bank behavior changes by evaluating how much programmatic decisions follow the new substantive and process requirements of World Bank environmental and indigenous peoples policies adopted in the 1980s (local input in project design, careful consideration of alternative designs, and environmental impact assessment). This means imposing a relatively modest test in comparison to the measures advocated by radical ecologists, but it makes findings of partial progress all the more revealing because it says that the bank is still having trouble living up to the commitments it has adopted. Though Fox and Brown do not discuss it in those terms, their scattered remarks suggest that the World Bank has taken steps toward developing a better system for policy review that have the potential to improve its performance.

Tolba's lessons of successful environmental negotiation include several relevant to the decisionmaking phase. Besides good information, securing agreement to significant environmental commitments requires strong leadership—including readiness to "overfulfill" treaty commitments—by one or more participating governments, active pushing of discussions in an environmental direction by the intergovernmental organization involved, and inclusion of government representatives willing to take strong and imaginative positions. It also

requires provision of sufficient assistance to governments lacking the administrative capacity or other resources to implement commitments, and pressure from knowledgeable national and transnational social actors (see pp. 44–45, 83–85).

Much of the analysis in the Fox and Brown book covers implementation and implementation review, but the Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff book provides a far more wide-ranging discussion focused on the development and operation of what they call “systems for implementation review.” They use systems theory to deepen our understanding of implementation review by focusing not only on the mechanisms for information gathering and behavior monitoring formalized in environmental agreements but also on the informal practices that evolve domestically and internationally as advocates of meeting commitments maintain pressure on slackers and laggards.

The three editors and their collaborators focus mainly on how well governments actually live up to their commitments even though they are aware that the environmental impact of international agreements depends on the environmental soundness of the commitments as well as on how far states actually live up to them. They use the greater tractability of subject matter to offer an exemplary discussion of the analytical difficulties involved in attributing behavioral change to the existence of an international regime, since a regime is always only one of several factors influencing government behavior (pp. 4–15, 659–671). The significance of these factors becomes clearest in those chapters, mostly written by Russian scholars, that examine Russian (chaps. 12–14) and Eastern European (chaps. 14, 15) fulfillment of commitments to reduce pollution. These chapters make clear that international commitments have had minimal effect on Russia and that Russian pollution reductions stem mainly from economic collapse. Nor do they permit much optimism about what will happen when Russian economic recovery occurs. Chapter authors strive to follow the common analytical outline provided by the editors. This makes the book a good example of the careful tracing of cause and effect that should guide research on compliance issues in any field.

The volume’s systems approach also goes beyond much of the “compliance” literature by treating the formally specified mechanisms of behavior monitoring included in a particular international agreement as part of a wider “system for implementation review” (or SIR) including supplemental informal mechanisms. Chapters on five international agreements, featuring both clear policy commitments and some formalized implementation review (CITES, Ozone Layer, Baltic Sea Pollution, Trade in Hazardous Wastes and Chemicals, and European Air Pollution), describe the evolution and operation of the relevant SIR in considerable detail and allow considerable cross-regime comparison. The eight chapters on national implementation efforts complement the earlier discussions by looking at the implementation of particular agreements within selected countries and assessing how and to what extent the relevant SIR affected national

conduct. The analysis suggests a way to think about the problems of moving from changed policy to altered programmatic performance identified in the Fox and Brown volume. Increased grassroots and transnational group attention to World Bank activity, increased governmental pressures—particularly at International Development Association (IDA) replenishment time, establishment of the World Bank Inspection Panel, and the occasional internal reviews of policy implementation—are elements of an emerging system for implementation review that could be drawn more closely together and made to operate more effectively.

Only Tolba's book has nothing explicit to say about policy redesign; it is focused almost exclusively on the initial negotiation of environmental agreements and the conditions that make agreement easier or harder to reach. Yet even the initial agreements involve policy redesign at a broader level: replacement of environmentally unconscious worldviews and policy processes with environmentally conscious ones. Bossel's book is one thoughtful review, inspired heavily by the work of a large group of environmentally oriented systems analysis institutes and researchers in Western Europe in which Bossel is a longtime participant of the overall redesign. Yet, like many visionaries, he is vague about the process of getting to the preferred future from where we are now. The clearest advice he offers relies heavily on the systems analysis assumption of interconnection through which identifying and changing certain key structures create effects that spread to and alter other structures, until the whole system is reconfigured on the desired new basis. For Bossel, the key alterations are economic, such as limiting cross-regional trade (and hence economic globalization) through tariffs that compensate for differences in costs of production in different regions plus high taxes and capacity limitation on long-range transport of goods, and limiting the significance of money in regional and local economies by shifting to a part cash, part work-hour credit basis of exchange. Bossel is confident that in tandem these changes will allow the establishment and maintenance of largely autonomous regional and local economies that will have to live within their immediate ecological constraints rather than draw on goods produced elsewhere. These changes could also foster a more local, mutual interaction-rich way of life that will solve the whole host of social problems (unemployment, gender inequality, crime, and social stigmatization of difference, to name a few), that Bossel attributes to the growing division between the few well-paid and the many under- or unpaid in the current monetary economy. Nevertheless, the basis for assuming that there are "master" changes that can drive others, and the reasons for assuming that these are indeed the master changes, is not made clear in this book. Many of his conclusions regarding the "sustainability checks" applied to critique Path A features and the "reality checks" applied to argue that Path B alternatives are feasible also rest on unexplained assumptions, so each reader is likely to be

more persuaded by some judgments than others. Bossel admits as much for he offers his vision as one person's view and invites readers to argue and take issue.

Contributors to the Fox and Brown book focus less on justifying the criteria for policy redesign that they advocate than on identifying the features of contestation between advocates of change and partisans of continuity that make adoption of redesigns more or less likely. Like a long stream of political analysis going back at least to Edward Schattschneider, they find that altering the constellation of actors paying attention and using resources to exert influence on the decision-making process offers differential advantage to contending sides. So long as decisions remained within the economics-trained operational staff, policy redesign was marginal at best; only when other actors were brought in could the balance of influence be shifted sufficiently for advocates of redesign to make headway. The Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff book relates implementation review to policy redesign in two ways: as an identifier of problems in securing compliance that might be addressed by redesign of compliance inducement or enforcement, and as an identifier of environmental trends indicating a need to undertake new or changed commitments.

Their reflections on compliance lead directly to consideration of two questions now hotly debated among international lawyers: whether legally binding commitments ("hard law") or voluntary codes of conduct ("soft law") elicit greater behavioral change and whether failure to live up to commitments can be handled best through "management" or "enforcement." Unlike Tolba, who regards soft law as a prelude to his preferred solution of binding commitments in treaty form (pp. 31, 171), their review leads Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff to regard each as a distinct form of obligation creation best used under different sets of conditions. Yet their focus on the implementation and its review phases leads them to conclude that soft law, although conducive to the making of clearer and more ambitious commitments, is not a cure-all. Soft law will suffice for use of the compliance management approach focusing on positive inducements, but does not provide the more solid legal basis needed for application of enforcement measures. Since maintaining almost all international agreements that involve demanding commitments depends on the availability of enforcement possibilities, hard law is needed in most areas (pp. 681–684). This leads them to stress the usefulness of regime designs combining a basic level of obligations for all with voluntary "overcommitment" by governments most concerned and ready to act as a way to let "leaders" explore the frontiers of feasibility (pp. 685–687).

Despite their equation of "effectiveness" with adherence to commitments, Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff find it impossible to ignore environmental outcomes, both because environmental improvement is the stated goal of the agreements and because the systems for implementation review established so

far have included assessment of environmental trends as one of the review tasks. The combination means that governments become committed to what Peter Sand has called a “preordained learning process”³ in which they are obligated to make environmental impact analyses and consider whether alternate policy formulations would lead to additional improvements at stated intervals. Provisions for periodic assessments do not guarantee that governments will take the task seriously, but do mean that those governments and nongovernmental actors who want to take reassessment seriously can get the question on the agenda and pressure for change.

In different ways, each book emphasizes the importance of simultaneous action by individuals and groups to change their own daily lives, and their smaller and larger social organizations in order to “green” the world. Fox and Brown bring this home vividly in their visual diagram of sources of “green” pressure on the World Bank (p. 498), highlighting clusters of “green” influence in each of the contending groups of actors: donor governments, borrower governments, the World Bank executive directors, the World Bank staff, advocacy groups within industrial societies, and advocacy groups within developing societies. Though some of the chapters present a simple advocates versus World Bank analysis, Fox and Brown conclude that any such analysis is inadequate for understanding the actual dynamics of change. Tolba’s “lessons learned” also emphasize the simultaneous need for public pressure (usually expressed through organized advocacy groups), leadership from intergovernmental organizations, and political entrepreneurship by committed government delegates. The Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff book illuminates the range of national, transnational, and intergovernmental pressures that must be brought to bear roughly simultaneously to clean up and keep clean a shared sea, river, or atmosphere, or to avert local patterns of behavior that threaten the health and safety of species and individuals.

Though standing in many respects at the frontiers of current research on environmental issues, the volumes under review also suggest some directions for further improvement of the shared knowledge base on which efforts for change must rest. With the proliferation of international environmental agreements, it is now possible to be more systematic in selecting cases and examples for study, not simply because they are there but because they display similar and different patterns that permit drawing more precise conclusions about various combinations of background conditions that affect the shape and success of cooperation. Very little of the current international environmental cooperation literature

³Peter H. Sand, “Institution-building to Assist Compliance with International Environmental Law: Perspectives,” *Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht* [Journal for Foreign Public Law and International Law] 56, No. 3 (1996): p. 792.

selects cases in this way. Yet the Fox and Brown and Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff books do contribute to widening the base of existing case studies by treating relatively understudied areas of the world. Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff's contributors add to our knowledge of the situation in countries in economic transition, facing the multiple problems of defining a market basis for the economy, developing stronger modes of democratic governance, and taking on the environmental agenda their former rulers so long ignored. Contributors to the Fox and Brown book supply accounts of grassroots groups and environmentalist coalitions in developing states.

Similarly, broad visions of the good society like that presented by Bossel need to be supplemented with lessons in the analytical and managerial skills required to maintain ecological sustainability as human knowledge, technologies, and societies continue to evolve. Maintaining ecological sustainability and democratic governance simultaneously requires that more people learn such things as how to acquire the information for and conduct a "lifecycle analysis" of products and structures; how to handle large volumes of data summarized in charts, graphs, and tables; or how quickly to proceed in the face of incomplete information and changing knowledge fields. Concern for the environment is now great enough that future environmental mistakes are not going to stem from failure to pay attention; they will stem from incomplete analysis that fails to factor in some unidentified (probably because unintended) bad effect. At initial adoption, both asbestos and chlorofluorocarbons appeared to be excellent solutions to particular problems; their bad consequences became apparent only later on. Even with the best of ethics and social organization, we need techniques for ongoing assessment of potentially negative or unintended consequences. We must allow faster identification and adoption of alternatives that offer a better mix of benefit and cost than currently characterizes policymaking in any country. This brings us back full circle to the importance of ideas—both the macrolevel ethical and organizational ideas that guide human organization and interaction, and the microlevel ideas of how to do things that inform particular activities.