

Book Reviews

Anand, Ruchi. 2004. *International Environmental Justice: A North South Dimension*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Reviewed by Paul G. Harris
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This short book attempts to satisfy the need for “a thorough assessment of environmental justice concerns at the global level” (back cover). Ruchi Anand examines an argument now familiar to those who study global environmental politics: The developed countries of the global North have an obligation to take action on environmental problems before the developing countries are required to do so, and the rich countries should aid the developing world as recompense for past pollution in the North and to aid the poor countries in carrying out environmental protection measures of their own. This notion of differentiated responsibility has become well established in international environmental agreements signed since the 1980s.

At the outset Anand identifies two types of justice relevant to environmental issues in both domestic and international contexts: procedural and distributive. Procedural justice, she says, “uncovers the dynamics of the inequitable bargaining powers of people/communities with different levels of economic development,” whereas distributive justice “uncovers the inequitable distribution of social, economic, and political burdens on people/communities with different levels of development” (p. 10). Environmental justice is about “determining what is fair, to whom it is fair, to whom it is not fair and how these determinations are made about rights, fairness and entitlements to justice, etc. Justice, however, is a matter of judgment and this judgment influences the manner in which justice is rendered” (p. 14).

Indeed. But how is one to judge? Most readers will be looking for a reasonably concise definition of environmental justice that can be applied to understanding and/or realizing it in the international context. Alas, Anand does not attempt to really pull apart the concept of justice until the final “Conclusion” chapter (in a section oddly titled “A Recapitulation” [sic]), where she lays out some theories and perspectives that “grapple with the nature and definition of justice” (p. 122). These include utilitarianism and contractarianism, right to development, obligation not to harm, common-but-differentiated responsibility, duty not to discriminate and so forth. In some sense this list complicates the

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discussion so late in the game, but it is helpful that the reader is introduced to these approaches before the book ends.

Anand applies a broad idea of international justice to three international environmental issues: climate change, trade in hazardous wastes and ozone depletion. She shows that the North has done far too little to implement international environmental justice in these cases. She perhaps goes too far when she asserts that the “countries of the North have not, by far, been sensitive to these demands [for international environmental justice] of the South” (p. 5). It is certainly true that developed countries have done relatively little in this regard, but it is perhaps unfair to lump all countries of the North together. Some European countries in particular have worked hard to bring the rest of the developed world—not least the United States, which rightly comes in for criticism in this book—along the path of actualizing international environmental justice. They have in fact been sensitive to the South’s reasonable demands, and they have started to restrict their own global pollution and increase their international environmental aid. That they ought to do much more is, sadly and shamefully, all too true. But just because I do not give more to the poor does not (necessarily) mean I am insensitive to their calls for justice.

Given the disproportionate harm of the North for global environmental degradation and resulting harm suffered in the South, it is not surprising that a book such as this would take the side of the latter. However, it is rather frustrating that the author makes little attempt here to explain the “North’s” behavior, which is portrayed as having the unjust treatment of the South as its primary objective. For example, she argues that a scenario involving “the North not considering climate change as a serious problem” whereby “the South will lose and there will be no scope for international cooperation or the success of an effective climate change treaty” is one that will “invariably result in success of the North” (p. 26). One wonders how the author defines success. This scenario would be a great failure of and for the North, from both a practical, self-interested perspective (one is reminded of the very costly spate of hurricanes in Florida during 2004) and by any reasonable ethical measure. International environmental justice does actually concern many policymakers in the North, particularly outside the United States. Anand seems to assume that “the North” lives to keep the South down, even if this is self-defeating. As such, the subject of precisely *why* the North has not done much more to meet its obligations of international environmental justice is largely ignored.

While most of the book is descriptive, at times the author becomes rather idealistic: “In conclusion I lay out some possible answers to the question: what does climate justice look like?” The first answer: “Removing all [presumably human-induced] causes of climate change so that the Earth can thrive and nourish each of our lives” (p. 57). It is hard to disagree with this answer, and I expect all readers of this book want the Earth to thrive in this way, but I doubt anyone expects, even in their wildest imaginings, that we might remove all causes of climate change. What are we supposed to do with this answer? Other answers,

such as “Providing assistance to those most affected by climate change” (p. 57), are much more practicable.

There are stylistic drawbacks to this book. For example, at times it reads like a doctoral dissertation and at others like a reprinted journal article: “this paper seeks to theoretically examine the usefulness of the lens of environmental justice in understanding global politics from a North-South dimension” (p. 8). There is also the annoying practice of not including page numbers for the very many quotes and citations. Anyone wanting to unearth the original sources will have to do a lot of unnecessary digging. The index is very short; terms such as common but differentiated responsibility, equity (a common synonym for justice in the context of this book, although this is barely addressed) and responsibility do not appear. The book also misses much of the literature on this topic.

This book is most suited to patient students and scholars, who will be rewarded with some important, if well-rehearsed, insights on international environmental justice. The book deserves a place alongside existing literature in this field.

Economy, Elizabeth C. 2004. *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

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China is the world's most rapidly developing country as well as a nation suffering greatly from environmental degradation. Water is increasingly scarce; forest resources have shrunk; fully one-fourth's of China's land area is now desert; air, land, and water are heavily polluted. Indeed, China's rivers do run black, as Elizabeth Economy titles her comprehensive and readable account of changes to China's environment in the era of economic reform.

Although China's environmental problems are comparable to those of other developing nations, the scale of the Chinese population—1.3 billion—in an area somewhat larger than the United States makes the case of China exceedingly important in global environmental politics. Too, China contributes greatly to three serious global environmental problems—greenhouse gas emissions, transboundary acid rain, and biodiversity loss. For these reasons, readers of this journal should pay attention to the prospects for the improvement of China's environmental protection regime.

Economy's first chapter surveys the serious problems of environmental degradation in China and their cost, estimated at 8 to 12 percent of GDP. She distinguishes her book from other interpretations by its focus on political institutions and politics, asking these questions:

- “Who are the key actors and what is their relative power?”
- How are resources allocated to environmental protection?