

Book Reviews

Epstein, Charlotte. 2008. *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Reviewed by Patricia M. Keilbach
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Charlotte Epstein's book will find its way on to the required reading lists of students, scholars and practitioners interested in understanding how ideational and normative forces shape outcomes in international relations. While this book is not the first analysis of the shift from whaling to anti-whaling, it is the first contribution to the literature to uncover the social powers responsible for a change in understanding of the relationship between humans and whales. Epstein's book stands out not only because it provides a rich analysis of the historical trends in whaling. Rather, what makes this book exceptional is that this lens on whaling gives us significant insight into the power of words, ideas, and normative interests and how they work to reshape international relations. Epstein's book uncovers the real story about whaling, successfully explaining why worldwide attitudes toward whaling shifted in the second half of the twentieth century from acceptance to moral censure. Material forces do not explain this shift: whales had been known to be endangered because of whaling and yet humans had failed to act on those material interests, even in the face of the near collapse of the whaling industry. The new anti-whaling ethics emerged because states reconstructed their interests, and Epstein shows us how and why.

Throughout the ages humans have been virtually spellbound by whales. These massive and majestic creatures conjure images of both danger and intrigue. One simultaneously imagines the challenges of Moby Dick in his quest for revenge against the giant whale Ahab, and the courage of Paikea the Whale Rider who traveled the vast distance on a back of whale to found a civilization. These mammals are resource-rich, providing an abundance of materials for human consumption and economic gain. They are also highly intelligent and social creatures, traveling vast distances, living long lives, communicating and developing organized social structures and connections. For these and other reasons, the interaction between humans and whales has a mixed history.

Epstein delves into the history, beginning with a discussion of the pro-whaling time period. She highlights the material forces leading to the rise and dominance of the whaling industry in the first half of the twentieth century. She examines the political economy of whaling and the various ways whale resources are consumed. While it would seem that this early period of pro-whaling could be explained by the economic gains of this activity, Epstein high-

lights the “coconstitutivity of discursive and material practices” (p. 51). More specifically, whaling went on long after material interests fell away. Actors did not respond to material forces alone. Not until a new discourse emerged that cast whales in a new light did actors rethink their interests. Her argument combines constructivism and rationalism: “it is precisely because discursive and material interests are so deeply entwined that discourses cannot flourish without the appropriate material conditions” (p. 50).

Epstein then “unpacks” the relationship between whaling and state interests and shows us how these were conjoined. Interestingly enough, state identities were built on whaling efforts, and states even learned managerial functions through this practice, as Foucault reminded us they would. Once states began building identities around whaling they soon became the subjects of international whaling cooperation. By showing us how sovereignty was reformulated, Epstein opens the door for understanding the emergence of notions of communal management.

During the second half of the twentieth century, anti-whaling becomes the dominant discourse and Epstein asks, why now? We might expect states to develop this view when material interests declined. But the emergence of this new ethic does not coincide with the decline in value of the resource. A new storyline was crafted about whales and this storyline became the dominant global discourse. It was convenient to craft such storyline because the whaling industry was almost extinct, and environmentalism was on the rise. The net result was the creation of a far-reaching discourse coalition, which simultaneously spurred the creation of new NGOs that have since shaped the relations between state and non-state actors within the International Whaling Commission (IWC) today. It was through this process that states redefined their interests and came to take on identities as “environmental” states.

In examining the normative turn, Epstein successfully integrates theoretical developments from global environmental politics and from the literature on non-state actors, revealing the need to combine international and domestic levels of analysis to understand how new discourses emerge and are reinforced. For example, science is also impacted by dominant norms and thus it often has little impact on policymaking. Campaigns are often more persuasive than science itself, but they alone cannot explain why so many actors accept a new discourse.

The final part of the book looks at how this anti-whaling discourse is perpetuated. Epstein highlights an important distinction between subject and subjectivity, uncovering just how identities are taken on by states, groups and individuals alike. Within the IWC, the complicated history led states to identify themselves in binary terms as either “pro-whaling” or “anti-whaling.” In examining current dynamics with the IWC and looking for new solutions, we must recognize where these states came from and how far they have traveled in order to understand their interests in the future. Doing so requires a move away from conceptualizing power and interests in material terms and toward understanding how ideas can create new calculations for actors.

Our understanding of international relations is greatly enhanced by recognizing the power of words, ideas, norms, and discourse in determining outcomes in the global arena. While we have long recognized how interests change when economic factors change, we have only begun to understand how interests can be reshaped by the emergence of new ideas that do not rest upon economic calculations. If actors can recalculate interests to include non-material gains such as moral and ethical “right-doing,” there is much hope to coordinate actions in the global commons along common frames of understanding. *The Power of Words in International Relations* challenges mainstream IR theories and demonstrates how social power is redefining global politics. In this way, Epstein’s book breaks new ground and clears a path for further study of the ways in which ideational forces can overwhelm the power of material forces in the realm of international relations.

McAllister, Lesley K. 2008. *Making Law Matter: Environmental Protection and Legal Institutions in Brazil*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

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Telling an “atypical story about environmental law in a developing country” (p. 2), Lesley McAllister details the process of institutional reform in Brazil through the 1980s and 1990s that led to the meaningful enforcement of environmental law and the strengthening of the rule of law. Grounded in a detailed and careful comparative study of environmental prosecution agencies in two Brazilian states, São Paulo and Pará, McAllister’s analysis speaks to a broad audience of legal and political scholars interested in better understanding the role of legal institutions in environmental protection.

The implications of McAllister’s analysis are not restricted to an understanding of the legal environment in Brazil. She suggests that other developing countries, particularly in Latin America, “with substantial but underenforced legal frameworks for environmental protection” should consider Brazilian prosecution agencies as models for their own institutional reform (p. 196). This account of environmental law enforcement has implications for understanding societal order more generally. McAllister contends that the rule of law is eroded when environmental law-breaking goes unpunished, and, similarly, that making environmental law more effective contributes to constructing the rule of law generally.

McAllister sketches the framework for her study in the first chapter, and delves into the central arguments, supported by rich detail from her fieldwork, in the subsequent chapters. Her arguments about the increased effectiveness of environmental law enforcement in Brazil are supported by evidence gathered from a range of sources, including archival research, interviews, and participant-observation from several months spent in internships in relevant legal agencies in Brazil.