

Book Reviews

Woods, Kerri. 2010. *Human Rights and Environmental Sustainability*. Cheltenham, UK, and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

*Reviewed by Armelle Gouritin
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Kerri Woods' new book asks whether environmental values and human rights values are mutually supportive. She identifies three distinct steps in this evaluation. First, what is the political added value of grounding environmental claims in human rights regimes, institutions, and language? Second, are human rights values and sustainability values coherent or in conflict? Third, should scholars and activists use environmental human rights as a conceptual frame for their action? She approaches these questions through three perspectives: a conceptual one, a normative one, and one of political relevance.

These questions are policy relevant and incisive. NGOs and institutions addressing environmental challenges (such as climate change) increasingly use a human rights approach in their endeavors. Scholarship, however, has not provided much theoretical consideration of the value of this approach, and empirical evidence on whether human rights support or conflict with environmental claims remains scarce. This study aims to fill these gaps, from a political science perspective.

Woods demonstrates that economic globalization generates environmental deterioration. It puts environmental resources under ever-greater pressure, and increases waste production. This environmental deterioration is triggered by a number of factors (including increasing transport use and the displacement of environmental costs, among others). In turn, environmental deterioration threatens human security. This threat, she argues, calls for human rights mobilization. She argues that the use of human rights language and human rights approaches can support the definition and promotion of alternate values regarding consumption and production.

Woods considers human rights and environmental sustainability separately. In her consideration of human rights, she looks at language, values, and regimes with a view to establishing whether the human rights framework is a hospitable framework for addressing environmental issues. She then focuses on two issues: the legitimacy of human rights regimes and their capacity to host environmental claims, despite potential problems from the lack of universalism, economic and political coercion, state-centrism, and the underfulfillment of human rights. The values of freedom and democracy together with human

rights regimes, she concludes, are not sufficient to support environmental claims.

In addressing environmental sustainability, Woods provides a clear and well-referenced study about what “sustainability” actually encompasses, addressing the tension between ecocentrism (in which nature has intrinsic value) and anthropocentrism (in which nature has an instrumental value). She eventually rejects this dichotomy, arguing that both models have the potential to put forward environmental claims. She supports the weak anthropocentric approach, since this approach embodies humans as ecologically embedded. She then explores models of environmental economics to establish whether they can address relevant issues related to sustainability: the tragedy of the commons linked to environmental discounting and intergenerational justice. Woods concludes that the notion of “ecological” or “ecosystem” integrity is the appropriate benchmark of sustainability, conceptualizing the integrity of the ecosystem as “a function of stresses to which the environment is exposed” (p. 97). She identifies environmental citizenship as a route, but an insufficient one, to put forward ecological integrity claims.

In this analysis, human rights and environmental protection commitments are ultimately interdependent. Human rights will guarantee that environmental politics do not become oppressive. Human rights can also help foster a consensus around the notion of ecological integrity. At the same time, environmental integrity issues can transform human rights when the two are considered together.

Woods provides nuanced conclusions: unity among environmental claims and human rights language and regimes should neither be taken as guaranteed nor denied. There is a need to carefully assess the limits inherent to human rights, such as chronic underfulfillment of goals or the limited capacity of human rights to embody the intergenerational dimension of environmental claims. In other words, environmental human rights are part of the “green political toolkit” (p. 144).

This study will be useful for any scholar, public officer, or environmental activist engaged in environmental or human rights protection activities. Although it might have been useful to include greater attention to regional human rights regimes, Woods mixes both theoretical reasoning with concrete examples that can provide activists with new approaches to protecting both human rights and the environment.

Carmody, Pádraig. 2011. *The New Scramble for Africa*. Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Reviewed by Christopher Gore
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What explains China’s decision to send navy warships to the coast of Somalia to participate in a multi-country military effort to minimize piracy? To date,