

Global Environmental Responsibility in International Society

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Abstract

The emergence of global environmental responsibility as a fundamental norm, or primary institution, in international relations represents a dramatic expansion of the normative horizon of international society. The successful norm transfer from world society to international society was made possible by a transnational alliance of environmentalists and scientists, as well as representatives of states and international organisations, which acted as norm entrepreneurs to inject environmental ideas into the international agenda. In the end, its successful establishment in international society depended on it being championed by powerful states, which exported domestic environmental norms to the international level. As such, the greening of international relations represents a complex process of political enmeshment between international and world society, but it has done relatively little to slow down global environmental degradation. The norm of global environmental stewardship is still honoured more in the breach than in the observance.

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1. Introduction

The global environmental movement has had a profound and lasting impact on the normative structure of international society. It helped establish a fundamental commitment by states to protect the natural environment, both within their territory and internationally. This has given rise to global environmental responsibility as a norm of international relations. In English School parlance, this norm (also referred to as environmental stewardship) has become a primary institution of international society (Falkner and Buzan 2019). In contrast to secondary institutions (intentionally agreed treaties and regimes), primary institutions make up the underlying constitutional order of international relations. They are, as Buzan states, ‘relatively fundamental and durable practices, that are evolved more than designed’ and that are ‘constitutive of actors and their patterns of legitimate activity in relation to each other’ (Buzan 2004: 167). To be sure, global environmental responsibility is a relatively recent, and comparatively weak, addition to the existing set of primary institutions (e.g. sovereignty, territoriality, diplomacy, balance of power) that define the nature of contemporary international society. This chapter traces the process that has led to the emergence of global environmental responsibility, focusing on the interaction between world society and international society.

The chapter covers the period from the 19th century to the late 20th century, specifically up to the 1992 Rio ‘Earth Summit’ (for coverage of the post-1992 era, see chapters 6 and 7 in this volume). Although environmental ideas have a much longer history, reaching back to the 18th century and beyond (Worster 1994), organized environmental activism arose only in the second half of the 19th century, mainly in Europe and North America. By the early 20th century, leading industrialised states had begun to introduce the first environmental policies at the domestic level, but it took until the 1970s for international society to establish states’ general responsibility for the *global* environment. The first UN conference on the environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, was the key event that signalled the arrival of environmentalism on the international stage. In the Stockholm Declaration, the signatories accepted global environmental protection as ‘the duty of all Governments’. Before Stockholm, most states had viewed environmental issues in exclusively domestic terms, rejecting repeated efforts by campaigners to institutionalise an international environmental agenda. From 1972 onwards, however, more and more states came to accept that it was their responsibility – individually

and collectively – to protect global eco-systems and tackle transboundary pollution. Environmentalism is, therefore, rightly seen as having had a profound and lasting impact on the normative structure of international relations (Jackson 2000; Linklater 2006: 110; Falkner and Buzan 2019).

The chapter is structured into four parts. Section 2 introduces the ideational context in which environmental ideas and norms emerged. It identifies the three main varieties of environmentalism that provided distinctive options for the formulation of state responsibility for global environmental protection: the ethical commitment to nature preservation; the utilitarian rationale for nature conservation; and the obligation to prevent harm to humans from industrial pollution (see Introduction). Section 3 traces the origins of organized environmentalism in the 19th century, following its growing internationalization up to the League of Nations and failed efforts to establish an international environmental body. Section 4 examines the rise of modern environmentalism and the process that saw leading industrialised countries push for the adoption of state responsibility for the global environment at the 1972 Stockholm conference. Section 5 then traces the gradual globalization of the norm from Stockholm to the 1992 Rio ‘Earth Summit’, and section 6 summarises the main argument of this chapter.

2. Varieties of Environmentalism

The international norm of global environmental responsibility, or environmental stewardship, has its origins in a diverse set of ideas about the relationship between human society and nature that came to form the political ideology and movement of environmentalism. Environmentalist ideas originate in social and ideational shifts during the 19th century that occurred largely in response to the dramatically increased impact of human societies on the natural environment, brought about by the technological and economic changes of the industrial revolution. Environmentalism, and the idea of global environmental responsibility, stem from world society, that is the individuals and societal groups that operate transnationally beyond the state-centric world. As such, the greening of international society is a prime example of how world society actors can play a transformative role as international norm entrepreneurs, generating new norms that states end up adopting for themselves. It suggests a complex process of social integration between world and international society (Clark 2007: 181), partly because of the norm transfer initiated by the former, partly also because world

society actors continue to play a prominent role in driving the inter-governmental environmental agenda (Betsill and Corell 2008).

For global environmentalism to emerge as a transformative force in domestic politics and international society, three ideational shifts had to occur. The first shift laid the intellectual foundations for a new environmental awareness that redefined society's understanding of its relationship with the natural environment, giving rise to a sensibility that for the first time valued the preservation of nature over its exploitation. In the past, human societies had mostly feared the destructive potential of nature and sought to tame it. With the onset of the industrial revolution in the late 18th century, however, humans increasingly began to perceive nature as being threatened by rapid technological change and economic growth. Reacting to the coming industrial age, romantic artists and philosophers began to express a distinctive environmental aesthetic focused on nature's sacred and sublime beauty, while nature writers spread throughout society a growing appreciation of nature's diversity and precariousness (Nash 1989).

The second shift transformed environmental thinking into a political movement that impacted politics in the first industrializing countries. By the second half of the 19th century, heightened ecological sensibility had led to the creation of the first environmental organisations (e.g. Society for the Protection of Birds in Britain, Sierra Club in the United States, *Verband der Tierschutzvereine des Deutschen Reiches* in Germany) that campaigned for the preservation of wilderness, the protection of endangered species and an improvement in the environmental conditions of urban life. Originally operating in isolated and localised contexts, by the turn of the century environmental campaigners had created national environmental organizations in the industrialised world that also started to focus on transnational issues (e.g. migratory bird protection) (McCormick 1989: chapter 1). Over the course of the 20th century, environmental protection grew into a separate policy domain that the modern state increasingly came to recognise as falling within its core responsibility.

The third shift turned the various national environmental organizations into a global movement with far-reaching consequences for international society. While 19th century environmentalism was a mostly local and occasionally a national phenomenon, the 20th century saw the growing globalisation of environmental campaigning. The new science of ecology developed a better understanding of the planet's global ecological interdependence, and campaign groups increasingly pressed for

international action to deal with cross-border pollution and threats to global eco-systems. It was the rise of global ecology and the emergence of a global green movement that created the intellectual and normative framework within which international society came to identify states' responsibility towards the global environment (Falkner 2012).

Environmentalism is far from being a uniform set of beliefs. In fact, it feeds off many different intellectual traditions and has associated itself with different political ideologies, including liberalism, socialism and conservatism (Freedon 1996). The environmental tradition produced several different framings of what constitutes the environmental challenge and how politics should respond: the *preservation* of nature; the *utilitarian conservation* of natural resources; and the protection against industrial *pollution* (Hironaka 2014: 34-38).

The preservation framework has its roots in some of the earliest forms of environmental thinking. Informed by the so-termed arcadian approach to ecology (Worster 1994), preservationists envisage the natural world as inherently well-ordered and harmonious. They fear the destructive powers of an encroaching industrial age and call on society to restore the organic unity of all life forms. Some preservationists advocate a return to the simpler life of a predominantly rural setting, based on an ethic of care and restraint, and calling for moral self-judgement by individuals and society (see Introduction), while others merely seek to tame the excesses of industrialism, by setting aside areas of natural beauty and protecting endangered species. John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club and America's most famous exponent of preservationism, argued for the protection of wilderness as a sacred refuge, an antidote to the relentless expansion of modern industrial society. Humans should be seen as part of a wider ecological system, not dominating it but seeking accommodation within it (McCormick 1989: 12-17).

The utilitarian conservationist strand in environmentalism builds on Worster's imperial version of ecology and espouses a more human-centred approach to nature. According to this tradition, the modern science of ecology seeks to advance the scientific understanding of nature in order to enable humankind to dominate it, while the rational management of natural resources can ensure their long-term and sustainable usage by human society. Utilitarian conservationists are undoubtedly motivated by a desire to protect nature, but in their vision ecological knowledge ultimately serves as a tool for economic progress rather than restraint. George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature* (1864) is a

landmark publication in this context, providing one of the first systematic accounts of how deforestation leads to soil erosion and reduced soil productivity. The book had a considerable influence on forestry policy in the US, especially under President Theodore Roosevelt, whose administration promoted the creation of national parks and established the U.S. Forest Service with a mission to secure the long-term use of forests for economic gain (Steinberg 2002: 297).

A third strand of environmentalism grew mostly out of local concerns over industrial pollution and sought to improve living conditions especially in cities. It shared with the utilitarian conservationist tradition an anthropocentric view of nature, in that it sought to limit air, water and soil pollution for the sake of human well-being. The rapid spread of factories and power plants, often in close proximity to urban areas, produced various forms of environmental degradation, not only causing nuisance to local populations but also threatening their health. Sanitation, public health and hygiene thus became the focus of a reform movement in 19th century North America and Europe that sought to hold local businesses to account and impose regulatory restrictions on them (following a more causal logic of responsibility – see Introduction). In the United States, for example, anti-smoke leagues were formed where the growing use of coal-fired power generation had caused a dramatic decline in local air quality (Uekötter 2004: 118-9). The fight against industrial pollution was to become a central motive in the rise of the modern environmental movement especially after the Second World War, featuring high-profile campaigns against the seemingly ubiquitous threats from toxic chemicals, acid rain and nuclear energy.

These three frameworks of environmental protection differed with regard to their diagnosis of the environmental crisis and the policy solutions suggested. Each of these frameworks also made a distinctive contribution to the emerging debate on whether, and how, the nation-state and international society ought to take action to protect the global environment, and how state responsibility was to be understood. The preservationist movement expected the state to become a champion of nature protection domestically and internationally, setting clear limits to the expansion of industrial society and helping to preserve endangered species and eco-systems. Its campaigners pursued a narrowly defined environmental agenda, arguing for the creation of international institutions with authority to pursue nature preservation over and above competing economic interests. Theirs was a more expansive notion of state responsibility, based on a moral argument for international society's duty of care for the planet. Utilitarian conservationists similarly called for

national and international action to protect nature, but their conception of state responsibility took into account a wider range of national and international objectives, including the commercial use of natural resources on a sustainable basis. If states had a responsibility towards the global environment, then it was to be balanced with other competing concerns, and responsibility existed in the form of contractual obligations that states entered into through international negotiation. Anti-pollution campaigners likewise argued for international society to accept its responsibility to protect nature against the ravages of modern industry. By focusing on specific sources of industrial pollution, they lent strength to a framing of international responsibility that followed a causal model of accountability, giving rise to arguments about countries' obligation to reduce transboundary environmental harm and legal measures of redress based on accountability and liability (on different framings of responsibility, see the introductory chapter in this volume).

3. Environmentalism Goes Global: From the 19th Century to the League of Nations

Environmentalism first emerged as a political force in the second half of the 19th century. It combined several different concerns: the preservation of areas of wilderness through the creation of national parks; local campaigns addressing the most pressing environmental ills of the industrial age (e.g. urban air pollution); and the growing application of scientific insights to improve the long-term management of scarce resources (e.g. forests). At this point, these three strands of environmentalism were only loosely connected and did not form a coherent and nationally organized movement. In the United States, the Sierra Club (founded in 1892) played a key role in the creation of the world's first national parks; in Britain, the Society for the Protection of Birds (later renamed the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) was formed in 1891 and became the country's preeminent organization to promote animal protection (McCormick 1989: 4-5); and in Germany, the *Verband der Tierschutzvereine des Deutschen Reiches* (Association of animal protection societies of the German Empire), which by 1881 counted over 150 individual organisations among its members, likewise focused its efforts on animal protection issues (Radkau 2011: 70). Most of these organisations targeted *local* measures to improve environmental conditions and rarely concerned themselves with the *international* dimensions of environmental degradation.

Governments in the industrialised world were slow to respond to environmental concerns, mostly treating them as matters for local administration. The first legislative acts to protect the environment were introduced usually in response to specific but relatively isolated problems. In 1864, the US

government ceded Yosemite Valley to California as a state park, with the purpose of protecting the area from uncontrolled commercial development. In 1890, Yosemite was then turned into a national park, becoming the model for similar national parks elsewhere (Radkau 2011: 71). Municipal authorities and national governments also sought to limit air pollution in urban areas and began to create institutions for the sustainable management of forestry and other natural resources. By the end of the 19th century, environmental management was starting to become an integral practice of domestic statecraft in leading industrialised countries, though none at this time recognized a more general responsibility for environmental protection. The first environmental laws and regulations were *ad hoc* measures, often devolved to local administrations, that did not add up to a coherent national environmental policy.

Towards the end of the 19th century, environmental campaigners and state representatives also started to address the first environmental problems that were transboundary in nature. As early as in the 1860s, ornithologists and farming interests argued that some form of international regulation was needed to protect migratory birds. Soon after, moves were under way in England and in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to initiate an international agreement on this issue. The utilitarian rationale behind this initiative was clearly evident from its focus on the protection of birds that were useful to agriculture, allowing environmentalists to enlist the support of the farming sector – one of the earliest examples of a ‘baptist-bootlegger’ coalition (DeSombre 2010) in environmental politics. In 1872, the Swiss Federal Council proposed the creation of an international commission that would draft such an international agreement. It took until 1902, however, for the treaty - the first international environmental agreement of its kind - to be signed (Boardman 1981 26-8). At around the same time, the United States and Canada also began to regulate transnational matters of animal protection through international cooperation, signing treaties on fur seals (1911) and migratory birds (1916). These first environmental agreements were limited in their scope and focused on narrowly defined problems. They did not suggest that environmental protection had been established on the international agenda. What they did signal, however, was the growing transnationalisation of the environmental movement. Campaigners and scientists met at international conferences and established networks to coordinate the first transnational campaigns. Unsurprisingly, such international networking was limited to a small elite with connections in universities and government. Still, the environmental movement stands out as one of the main drivers behind the nascent world society that was beginning to have an impact on 19th century international society (Davies 2013: 49).

The first attempt to internationalise environmental protection was initiated by Theodore Roosevelt, the first US President with a strong interest in nature conservation. Roosevelt had used his authority to establish a conservationist agenda at the national level, creating the US Forest Service and establishing numerous bird reservations, national game preserves as well as national forests and parks. Having won the support of Canada, Mexico and Newfoundland at the North American Conservation Conference, held at the White House in February 1909, the US President proposed an international conference on ‘the subject of world resources and their inventory, conservation and wise utilisation’ (Nicholson 1972: 188). The Netherlands agreed to host such a conference and sent out invitations to 58 nations to meet in The Hague in September 1909. Before the conference could take place, however, Roosevelt’s second term in office came to an end. His successor, William Howard Taft, shared none of Roosevelt’s conservationist ideals and called off the conference (Nicholson 1972: 188). Without US support, European powers were unwilling to carry on with this initiative.

At around the same time, a second initiative was launched in Europe to establish an international agenda for nature protection. Convening in Paris in 1909, the International Congress for the Protection of Nature provided a platform for European scientists and environmentalists to promote international environmental cooperation. The conference culminated in the first ever call for the creation of a permanent international environmental body (Boardman 1981: 29). A year later, the Eighth International Congress of Zoology, held in Graz, Austria, formed a committee that would seek an intergovernmental agreement on this matter. After lobbying by Paul Sarasin, who had successfully campaigned for the creation of the first national parks in Switzerland, the Swiss government decided to convene a world conservation conference. The conference was held in Berne in 1913, with 17 countries including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Russia in attendance (Wöbse 2008: 522). The Berne gathering reached the first international agreement on the need to create an international environmental body, a sign that international society was starting to move towards recognising some level of responsibility towards the global environment. While 17 countries adopted the Act of Foundation of a Consultative Commission for the International Protection of Nature, the commission’s purpose was quite limited: it was to create a sound knowledge base about the current state of environmental issues and policies and disseminate ‘[p]ropaganda for the international protection of nature’ (Article VI) (Boardman 1981: 29). Its intended set-up was reminiscent more of

the international technical unions of the 19th century, aimed at facilitating international exchange and commerce, rather than the international environmental institutions of the late 20th century.

The outbreak of World War I made it impossible to convene a further international conference planned for August 1914. 14 countries still went ahead with nominating their delegates to the new body, but in the end the commission turned out to be a stillbirth. After the end of the war, some delegates tried to resuscitate the 1913 agreement but these efforts came to nothing (McCormick 1989: 22-23). Against the background of deep international divisions caused by the military confrontation, the notion that states should collectively assume responsibility for nature protection stood little chance of becoming part of the normative structure of international society.

The 1919 Peace Conference in Versailles provided environmental campaigners with a new opportunity to embed environmental issues in the international agenda. Yet again, activists sought the support of state representatives in Europe and North America. The great powers listened but were largely uninterested. In Britain, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) asked the foreign secretary Arthur Balfour to have animal rights included as a mandatory objective in the peace treaties. A Scandinavian coalition of animal rights campaigners petitioned the US President Woodrow Wilson to have international animal protection law established through the League of Nations. In similar vein, a formal submission by an Austrian campaigner proposed the creation of international law to protect migratory birds (Wöbse 2012: 136-7). None of these proposals were included in the agenda. Consequently, the League of Nations was not given a formal mandate for environmental protection (Boardman 1981: 30).

Yet, environmental organisations continued with their campaign and soon began to lobby Eric Drummond, the League of Nations' first Secretary-General, to take up their cause. The RSPCA, for example, asked for an 'International Charter for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals', arguing that article 23 of League treaty, which concerned states' social responsibilities, including humane work conditions for workers, should also extend to working animals (Wöbse 2012: 137-8). Drummond was initially sympathetic but quickly identified the League Secretariat's fundamental dilemma: the Secretariat could only act on this proposal if a member state submitted a formal proposal to this effect (Wöbse 2012: 138-9). World society actors had no authority to initiate new policy areas and depended on state support. Paul Sarasin, who had approached the League Secretariat with a proposal for the

moribund World Commission for Nature Protection to come under the aegis of the League (Wöbse 2012: 54), also discovered that none of the great powers were willing to lend their support. He abandoned his campaign in 1922 (Wöbse 2008: 524-5).

Recognising its own limitations when it came to establishing new global responsibilities, the League's Secretariat continued to encourage civil society organisations to develop transnational networks and put pressure on governments to take up environmental issues in the League (Wöbse 2012: 62-3). But for as long as member states were adamant in their defense of national sovereignty and refused to hand over any international environmental authority to the League, pressure had to come from within states. In the end, the League Assembly never debated environmental matters, and the lack of a functional mandate for environmental protection meant that international environmental issues were passed on to other technical sections of the League, such as transport and economic affairs (Wöbse 2008: 525).

Discouraged by these repeated failures, environmental campaign groups increasingly focused on more limited international initiatives, such as the *Internationale Komitee für Vogelschutz* and the International Office for the Protection of Nature (IOPN) in Berne (Wöbse 2012: 60). These initiatives were a case of 'too little, too late', however. Despite receiving some financial support from the governments of France, Poland and the Netherlands, IOPN never developed any traction in international politics. As Europe's international order began to disintegrate at the end of the 1930s, it became clear that transnational efforts at creating a formal international environmental agenda had failed. The transnational networks that had emerged in the early 20th century had managed to spread environmental knowledge and ideas around the globe, but without a stronger embedding of environmental values in the domestic politics of leading powers, efforts to establish states' global environmental responsibility came to nothing.

Certainly, environmental campaigners did have some limited success in areas of marine protection, although international agreements were negotiated in much smaller, plurilateral, settings. After proposals for a comprehensive marine protection regime based on the notion of shared international solidarity and responsibility were rejected at the League (Wöbse 2012: 187), a more limited whaling convention was drafted in 1930 and adopted in 1931. International lawyers hailed the convention as a 'landmark' treaty (Wöbse 2012: 234), not least because it established the principle of common use

of global resources, a principle that foreshadowed later developments after World War Two. Still, the treaty did not establish a working regulatory system to limit the killing of whales, nor did it establish a wider state responsibility for the global commons. The whaling convention remained an isolated, issue-specific, treaty based on a strictly utilitarian conservation logic of managing a scarce natural resource.

Oil pollution from shipping also became the focal point of one of the most prominent transnational campaigns in the interwar years. On several occasions, leading shipping nations considered the creation of an international convention to limit the discharge of oil from ships, first at an international conference in Washington, DC, in 1926 and then through a League of Nations expert commission in the 1930s. Despite reaching a preliminary agreement in 1926, efforts to internationalise a regulatory framework failed, leaving the matter in the hands of individual nations (Wöbse 2012: 93-95). It was only in 1954 that a renewed effort was made to create an international legal instrument to regulate oil pollution from shipping. Environmental campaigners may have helped establish an international agenda on marine pollution, but they failed to nudge international society into a deeper normative commitment to global environmental protection. The campaign did succeed in framing the oceans as a global commons, but as with other issues of global concern (e.g. human rights, development, see chapters by de Carvalho and Dashwood, in this volume), the major powers were not yet ready to accept a general responsibility for the common heritage of humankind.

4. The Emergence of Global Environmental Responsibility: From the Second World War to the 1972 UN Environment Conference

The immediate aftermath of the Second World War was an inauspicious time to relaunch the environmental campaign. Questions of economic recovery and political reconciliation dominated domestic politics in Europe, and the growing antagonism between the US and the Soviet Union overshadowed efforts by the UN to promote global collective action on social and economic issues. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the UN was not given a formal environmental mandate, and environmental problems continued to be viewed mainly as a domestic matter. Only UNESCO was able to include environmental issues in its work programme, though this was mostly restricted to the promotion of international scientific cooperation and information exchange.

The trauma of the Second World War did, however, help initiate a major intellectual shift that was to play a critical role in the subsequent resurgence of global environmentalism. The sheer scale of destruction caused by the war created a heightened sense of the threat that modern technology posed to the Earth's future. Indeed, when the US detonated the world's first atomic bombs in August 1945, the balance of power between humanity and nature appeared to have shifted irrevocably. Best-selling books such as Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet* (1948) and William Vogt's *Road to Survival* (1948) helped reinforce the perception that technological progress now threatened the very survival of humanity. Osborn argued that 'mankind was involved in *two* major conflicts' – the military confrontation of the Second World War and a 'silent war' against nature (1948: vii), while Vogt drew on Malthusian thinking to predict a future of environmental degradation and resource scarcity. Slowly but steadily, environmentalists were beginning to draw out the global connections in environmental politics, laying the ground for the rise of the international environmental agenda in the 1970s. As yet, though, there was no global environmental movement to give political expression to the emerging global ecological consciousness.

The first priority for environmentalists was to re-build the transnational networks that had developed before the war. The founding of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1948 was the most significant achievement in this regard, as it was the first body to represent a broad range of national environmental organizations and gave them a permanent platform to seek influence internationally. IUCN was an unusual body in that it straddled the state-centric and non-state centric realms. Initiated by UNESCO's first Secretary-General, Julian Huxley, it was established by agreement between representatives of governments and conservation organisations as a central mechanism for information exchange and coordination.

Compared to other world society concerns in the immediate post-war era, however, environmental issues were only weakly represented internationally. For example, in 1953 a total of 33 international NGOs operated with an explicit focus on promoting human rights, while only two were concerned with environmental issues (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 11). The established conservation organisations continued to focus their activities mostly on local and national problems, generating 'little international awareness' (Tucker 2013: 567). If anything, the founding of the IUCN as an explicitly hybrid international body with close links to the UN was the exception to the rule. Yet, it still had

more in common with nineteenth and early twentieth century elite lobbying than the new social movements of the 1960s that would transform environmental campaigning.

States continued to view environmental problems primarily as a national policy concern. Even in situations where limited international cooperation was needed to address transboundary environmental problems, the adoption of a few isolated treaties did not imply a normative shift towards recognition of *global* environmental responsibility. In 1946 leading whaling nations agreed the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), which established the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and developed an annual “schedule” of restrictions on the quantity, type, and methods of whale catches (Mitchell 1998: 144). The Convention’s most innovative aspect was its creation of a collective decision-making process for a shared common resource, which deviated from the traditional interpretation of sovereignty-based independent decision-making on whaling operations (Mitchell 1998: 144). But instead of pointing the way towards a new regulatory approach that treated oceans as a global common pool, the Convention functioned as a ‘whalers’ club’ (Andresen 1993: 109), privileging whalers’ short-term economic interests over scientific and environmental arguments. Similarly, the US, Canada and Japan signed the Convention for the High Seas Fisheries of the North Pacific Ocean in 1952 with the purpose of managing a scarce regional resource in order to protect their fishing industries rather than fish stocks (Flippen 2008: 618). Most of these treaties were driven by utilitarian conservationist concerns rather than a preservationist desire to protect nature as such.

The whaling and fisheries agreements of the post-war era are a good example of how marginal environmentalist ideas were to international cooperation in the 1940s and 1950s. Marine pollution from shipping was another area in which states began to cooperate, though without endorsing a more far-reaching environmental agenda. The first significant achievement was the 1954 Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil, which was amended in 1962. Together with two further conventions on the High Seas and the Continental Shelf, it limited shipping companies’ right to dump oil, required the installation of additional safety technologies and established rights of inspection (Mitchell 1994). The post-war era thus saw the re-emergence of international environmental diplomacy and selective efforts to promote the collective management of natural resources. But none of this required international society to accept a universal responsibility for global environmental protection. Reviewing the record of the post-war era, UNESCO aptly noted in 1968 that ‘the nations

of the world have lacked considered, comprehensive policies for managing the environment' (Caldwell 1996: 54).

The key transformative change only came in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the emergence of the modern environmental movement (Radkau 2011: 134-6). In his influential book *The Environmental Revolution* (1972), Max Nicholson captured the sense of a profound intellectual and political change that swept through many of the West's industrialised economies. Opinion polls show how popular concern for the environment in the US had been rising since the mid-1960s. On 22 April 1970, the first Earth Day turned into the hitherto largest demonstration in US history (Flippen 2008: 616). Modern environmentalism reshaped domestic politics not just in North America but also in Europe. In contrast to the conservation movement, the new environmental campaign organisations were rooted in the grassroots politics of the new social movements, with large membership-based groups adopting a more overtly political and global stance. From a sociological perspective, the prolonged post-war experience of economic growth and rising prosperity gave birth to new post-material values that placed environmental quality above further gains in material consumption. But while post-materialism may have boosted preservationist ideals that saw an intrinsic value in nature, it was more explicitly anthropocentric concerns – about how to curb industrial pollution and improve the well-being of society – that gave modern environmentalism its wider mass appeal. The modern green movement wanted to protect the natural environment so that humans could thrive in it (Radkau 2011: 147).

With the rise of a new environmental creed also came a new political focus and style of campaigning. New environmental NGOs (Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth) blamed the global ecological crisis on industry and capitalism. Whereas the conservation movement had nurtured close links with the political elite, favouring a consensus-oriented mode of influence-seeking, the new social movements sought to make environmental issues the subject of open political contestation over the future of industrial society (Radkau 2011: 143). Rather than cooperate with political elites, some campaign groups entered electoral politics with a view to changing the state from within. In Europe, newly created green parties entered parliaments in the 1980s and even joined governments in the 1990s.

The modern environmental movement also succeeded in reframing environmental degradation as an essentially *global* problem. When in July 1965 Adlai Stevenson, US Ambassador to the UN, referred

to the Earth as a little spaceship on which we travel together, ‘dependent on its vulnerable supplies of air and soil’ (Ward and Dubos 1972: 31), he could tap into the growing perception of the planet as an interconnected global eco-system. Building on the insights of the science of ecology, which offered a more holistic view of nature, it became common in the 1960s to refer to global ecological interdependencies and how the technological advances of industrialism posed a threat to global environmental stability. Indeed, when in 1972 NASA's Apollo 17 crew took the famous ‘Blue Marble’ picture of the Earth, the image resonated widely beyond scientific circles and reinforced the emerging notion of the Earth as an interconnected and fragile ecosystem.

While world society provided the initial impetus for this global normative change, political leadership in powerful industrialised countries played a critical role in creating the specific norm of environmental responsibility in international society. The rise of global environmental consciousness would not have had a lasting impact had it not evoked political responses in leading industrialised countries, above all in the US. Already in the 1960s, the Johnson Administration created a series of laws that firmly established environmental protection as a national policy domain (Wilderness Act of 1964, Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965, Solid Waste Disposal Act of 1965, Water Quality Act of 1965, Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, Air Quality Act of 1967). Many of these laws proved inadequate, however, and had to be strengthened or replaced in later years (Flippen 2008: 616). President Nixon continued to expand federal authority in environmental policy, creating the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Historians agree that electoral calculations rather than a genuine interest in nature protection were behind Nixon’s policy innovations (Flippen 2008: 614). Yet, the Nixon Administration’s institutional and legislative initiatives locked in bureaucratic support for an enhanced environmental responsibility. Importantly, America’s environmental policies and agencies were soon copied and further developed in other industrialised countries.

The Nixon years also mark ‘the birth of modern American environmental diplomacy’ (Flippen 2008: 614). Nixon’s advisers, among them Russell E. Train and Henry Kissinger, advocated a greater US role in promoting global environmental protection primarily as a way of increasing domestic support for the Administration and creating ‘a positive image of the US abroad’ (Hopgood 1998: 76). Train (2003: 78) himself doubted that Nixon, who publicly proclaimed that the US ‘had taken a leading role in international environmental cooperation’ (Flippen 2008: 633), believed in his own

environmental rhetoric. Still, US leadership paved the way for the first ever UN conference on the environment. Held in 1972, the Stockholm conference turned into a constitutional moment that formally established global environmental responsibility as a primary institution of international society.

The origins of the UN conference go back to July 1968 when the Swedish UN Ambassador submitted a proposal for such an event to the Economic and Social Affairs Committee (ECOSOC) of the General Assembly. The Swedish initiative, which was prompted by growing domestic concern over environmental problems, most notably transboundary air pollution, was well timed and quickly gained the support of several industrialised countries, including the US. Speaking before the UN General Assembly in 1969, US President Nixon stated that ‘increasingly, the task of protecting man’s environment is a matter of international concern’ (Macekura 2011: 499-500). The time was ripe for a redefinition of how international society related to the global environment.

With the UN General Assembly’s approval to convene the conference, diplomats and environmental experts held a series of meetings to work out the thematic focus of the conference and to agree the main principles that would guide future international environmental action. The main challenge was to bridge major divisions between industrialised and developing countries in how they viewed the origins and urgency of the ecological crisis. Recognising the critical role that environmental campaign groups had played in the formation of the new environmental consciousness, NGOs were given a parallel ‘Environment Forum’ alongside intergovernmental debates at Stockholm, with some 500 NGOs participating in the proceedings (Brenton 1994: 43).

Initially, expectations for the UN conference were modest, also within environmentalist circles (see Holdgate 1999: 112). Part of the problem was that the preparatory process had clearly focused on ‘human uses of the environment’ while the preservationist wing of the environmental movement expected nature protection to be prioritised. Unsurprisingly, therefore, some activists were suspicious of the intergovernmental process and ‘resented the idea that governments were taking over’ (Holdgate 1999: 113).

Growing rifts between the Western powers and the Soviet bloc also threatened to undermine the conference. The West refused to allow the German Democratic Republic – not a member of the UN

at the time – to participate, which prompted the Soviet Union and most of its allies to boycott the Stockholm conference. Even more worryingly, deep divisions between the North and the South threatened to undermine the event. Developing countries objected to the emphasis that the North had put on pollution issues and the need to curb unsustainable forms of economic growth, as expressed in the Club of Rome’s report *Limits to Growth*. Instead, poorer countries sought to shift the focus to the links between underdevelopment, poverty and resource scarcity, stressing the North’s historical responsibility for global ecological degradation. In 1971, Brazil and several other developing countries submitted a UN General Assembly resolution (Resolution 2849 (XXVI) Development and Environment) stating that ‘no environmental policy should adversely affect the present or future development possibilities of developing countries...’ (Holdgate 1999: 111).

In the end, delegates at the Stockholm conference agreed a compromise that stressed both the common responsibility shared by all states and the special responsibilities that developed economies needed to shoulder (on differentiated responsibilities, see Barral, in this volume). The conference adopted the Stockholm Declaration, marking the first explicit expression of global environmental responsibility as a core norm in international society. The Declaration was clearly a political compromise document, striking a careful balance between the need to protect resources and limit pollution, on the one hand, and references to the necessity of economic development and the sovereign rights of states to exploit their own resources, on the other. The outcomes of Stockholm may not have immediately impacted on policy-making, but laid the foundation for the expansion of the environmental agenda in subsequent years. This new normative commitment by states was not yet universally accepted, however, with the Soviet Union and its allies having boycotted the conference and developing countries remaining sceptical about what they perceived to be a Northern environmental agenda. But for the first time in history, major powers in international society had come to recognise a normative commitment to cooperate on global environmental protection.

5. *Globalisation and Contestation: Global Environmental Responsibility From the Stockholm (1972) to the Rio Conference (1992)*

The Stockholm agenda still needed to be globalised in subsequent years. Despite environmentalism having various non-Western sources (Guha 2000), it was the industrialised countries that had made the case for a specific form of environmental responsibility in international relations. As with human rights, Western powers used their dominance in the international system to advance a particular

environmental agenda that reflected their domestic norms but was global in ambition. By contrast, all communist countries and most developing countries were initially hostile to this agenda. It was not until the end of the Cold War and the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro that these countries too came to accept global environmental responsibility. By this time the international environmental agenda had broadened sufficiently to take on board non-Western perspectives. In this sense, Stockholm marked the end of a process of norm transfer from world society to international society, and the beginning of a process of norm diffusion throughout international society. By the time of UNCED in 1992, the meaning of global environmental responsibility had evolved, not least to take on board the concerns of developing countries that sought to balance environmentalism with the goal of economic development. The Rio Summit also strengthened the principle of differentiation in defining countries' international environmental responsibilities, which was to play a central role in the evolution of the climate regime from 1992 onwards (see also chapters by Barral, and Hafliðadóttir and Lang in this volume).

The 1970s witnessed several landmark developments that reinforced environmental stewardship as a new normative commitment in international society. The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP), the first UN agency dedicated to environmental protection, was established in 1973. Based in Nairobi, far from the main UN locations and commanding only modest financial resources, UNEP could never hope to play a leading role as the champion of environmental objectives within the UN system. Still, it facilitated a gradual expansion of the international environmental agenda, promoted international scientific data gathering and information exchange, and prepared the ground for a number of international environmental treaties. In some cases, UNEP was able to make a difference by providing political leadership at crucial points in international negotiations and engaging transnational actors in the inter-governmental process. Among the first successes of the new international environmental diplomacy were the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES 1973) and the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP 1979), which signalled international society's resolve to tackle transboundary environmental problems through international cooperation and law.

The 1980s saw a further expansion of the international environmental agenda with the first treaty to address atmospheric pollution. The 1985 Vienna Convention and its 1987 Montreal Protocol were negotiated to reduce and eventually eliminate global emissions of ozone layer depleting substances.

Driven by concerns over adverse health effects of a thinning ozone layer, especially in countries near the polar regions, leading industrialised countries (United States, Germany, France, Britain and Japan) agreed a formula whereby their chemical industries, which controlled nearly all global production of ozone-depleting substances (ODS), would gradually scale back such production. Reflecting the growing recognition of the differential environmental responsibilities, the Montreal Protocol granted developing countries a ten-year grace period to phase out their own ODS, offering them international aid to finance the transition process. Widely judged to have been a diplomatic and environmental success, the Montreal Protocol came to embody both the gradual expansion and strengthening of international society's normative commitment to global, and not just national, environmental protection. Close involvement of leading corporations also signalled greater willingness among the business community to take on an environmental responsibility (Falkner 2008: chapter 3).

By the end of the decade, a major new international conference was being prepared, which was supposed to take stock of international environmental policy-making and push for greater acceptance of global environmental responsibility. Industrialised countries were keenly aware of the need to gain greater legitimacy and support for global environmental protection, particularly in the developing world. Industrial pollution issues in the North still dominated the international agenda, but by the 1980s developing countries were beginning to push more actively for international recognition of their own environmental concerns. This was partly about giving greater prominence to distinctly Southern environmental concerns, concerned less with industrial pollution than poverty-related ecological problems, and partly about creating a more explicit balance between environmental protection and developmental needs. The 1992 'Earth Summit' would come to play a key role in reinforcing international society's commitment to environmental stewardship, but with developing countries' concerns more fully reflected.

The intellectual blueprint for this renewal of the environmental agenda was provided by the 1987 Brundtland Commission report 'Our Common Future'. The report promoted the idea of sustainable development as the ideational core of the new global compromise that would make environmental responsibility a truly global norm. Ever since its promotion by the Brundtland Commission, the concept has been criticized for adding little substance to the debate on how to achieve economic development while protecting the environment. Yet it managed to build a broad coalition of

influential actors, from industrialised countries to developing countries and the business sector, that would make the Rio Earth Summit a success. To be sure, the Brundtland report was not the first occasion when sustainable development had been promoted internationally. Already in 1980, IUCN's World Conservation Strategy introduced the concept in international policy discourses. But because IUCN prioritised protecting living resources and failed to pay adequate attention to the political and economic context in which environmental issues manifested themselves in developing countries (Bernstein 2001: 58-61), it was less successful in building the necessary intellectual and political coalitions behind its sustainable development agenda.

When the UN Conference opened in Rio in 1992, the old tensions and unresolved dilemmas of the Stockholm conference agenda resurfaced. Northern ideas of promoting nature protection and combating industrial pollution clashed with Southern notions of a broader developmental agenda that linked sustainability to a more equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities. While all three environmentalist traditions – the preservationist, utilitarian and pollution control approaches – had distinctive Northern roots, countries from the Global South were most likely to engage with the utilitarian tradition that emphasised the need to protect natural resources for the benefit of human societies. However, in contrast to Northern interpretations that emphasised the interests of *future* generations, representatives of the Global South attached greater importance to a balancing of environmental and economic needs of *current* generations. The concept of sustainable development, as expressed in the Brundtland Report, softened this conflict by speaking of a balance between the needs of current and future generations, though without resolving the inherent tension.

To some extent, the new spirit of international cooperation after the end of the cold war helped to create a more conducive diplomatic environment. More important, however, was the change in attitudes among Southern elites since 1972, which was driven by the growth of environmental concerns and the creation of environmental policies and institutions in their own countries, and greater engagement with environmental issues by multilateral development banks such as the World Bank (Williams 1993). Societal awareness had also grown, and a significant number of Southern NGOs had become engaged in the multilateral process of UNCED (Bernstein 2001: 84-5). The norm of environmental stewardship had not only spread among political elites worldwide but was also increasingly rooted in domestic societal values in an ever-larger number of countries.

The Rio Earth Summit concluded with the adoption of the Rio Declaration, which updated the Stockholm Declaration and encapsulated the new spirit of sustainable development and multilateral environmental cooperation. Its core comprises a statement of global environmental responsibility, universally agreed by the members of the UN. But this general commitment to ‘cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem’ is juxtaposed with the principle that ‘[i]n view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities’ (Article 7). Developing countries succeeded in elevating their developmental aspirations and rights as part of the sustainable development agenda (Articles 3, 4, 5) and asserting their sovereign right to exploit their own natural resources (Article 1). Instead of defining global environmental responsibility as a shared responsibility for the global commons, based on the principle of the ‘common heritage of mankind’, the Rio compromise stressed the responsibility of each state to contribute to cooperative efforts that are multilateral in nature and reflect different levels of developmental achievement. In doing so, the Rio conference firmly anchored global environmental responsibility in a normative framework that stressed national sovereignty, international equity and developmental principles.

The equity dimension of Article 7 was re-iterated in the common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) norm of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, also agreed at the Rio Summit in 1992. The agreement represents a delicate balance between the idea of universally shared environmental responsibilities, on the one hand, and differentiation with regard to the climate mitigation burden and provision of international environmental aid, on the other. The CBDR norm did not resolve all North-South tensions and has come under growing attack in recent years, particularly as the rapid economic expansion rise in greenhouse gas emissions among emerging economies has undermined the burden-sharing formula of the Kyoto Protocol (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012). Still, recognition of global justice concerns and differential treatment remains a cornerstone of the global political bargain that helped globalize environmental responsibility and embed it within the normative structure of international society (Falkner 2019).

6. Conclusion

The emergence of global environmental responsibility as a fundamental norm, or primary institution, in international relations represents a dramatic expansion of the normative horizon of international society. It is the result of a long process of societal and international change that can be traced back

to the emergence of the environmental movement in the 19th century, though this transformative process only came to fruition after the Second World War. It is a prime example of successful norm transfer from world society to international society, enabled by a transnational alliance of environmentalists and scientists, as well as representatives of states and IOs, that acted as norm entrepreneurs to inject environmental ideas into the international agenda. In the end, however, its successful establishment at the international level depended on it being championed by powerful and influential states, which promoted the internationalization of environmental commitments they had already made in their domestic context. As such, the greening of international relations represents a complex process of political enmeshment between international and world society.

The norm of environmental stewardship, officially acknowledged in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and slightly modified in the 1992 Rio Declaration, was never codified in precise terms. Instead, it represents an amalgam of political, legal and moral meanings that different actors attached to the idea of global environmental protection. To some extent, preservationists' moral commitment to elevating nature above pure use value for human consumption provided a key inspiration. Environmentalism poses a normative challenge that operates at different levels, from individuals and their ethical orientation, to the societal and state level, and also the inter-state level. It amounts to a revolution in the moral landscape of humanity by bringing about an expansion of humanity's ethical horizon, beyond that of inter-human relations. It gives rise to new values centred on nature and aims at a re-ordering of the relationship between humans and their natural environment. By turning environmental protection into a moral duty – targeting individuals and states – it expands humanity's moral vocabulary and accords nature a new ethical status (Nash 1989: 9-10). It inserts into public consciousness and public policy a duty of care that goes beyond human welfare to include the integrity of nature. Because of the global interconnectedness of the Earth's eco-systems, it was a question of time for the global commons and the planet as a whole to become a normative concern for international society.

The creation of environmental stewardship was far from straightforward, however. The preservationist agenda of more radical versions of environmentalism was never able to establish itself internationally, beyond some limited efforts to protect endangered species and eco-systems. Instead, a more anthropocentric approach to protecting the environment in order to serve human needs became the main foundation for the political compromise that underpinned the Stockholm and Rio

conferences. In the end, the notion of a human right to a clean environment rather than nature's intrinsic value became the main motive behind international society's adoption of environmental responsibility. This anthropocentric orientation was reinforced when developing countries successfully claimed proper recognition for their developmental needs and a better balancing of environmental responsibility with the demands of economic growth and national sovereignty. Environmental responsibility of states would also be conditional on the realization of other, and often competing, political and economic objectives. Environmental stewardship was thus circumscribed by other, more established, fundamental norms of international society (Falkner and Buzan 2019).

In the nearly five decades that have passed since Stockholm, the international community has made good progress in institutionalizing environmental objectives and establishing international processes to agree new environmental targets and objectives. The emergence and strengthening of global environmental responsibility thus manifests itself in the growth of an ever denser web of international rules, agreements and organisations (so-called secondary institutions), and the universalization of an environmental citizenship principle that expects states to engage in multilateral efforts to tackle global environmental degradation. In this sense, Linklater is right when he points out that environmentalism is 'among the most radical changes of political orientation of the last three or four decades' (2006: 110). But the success of progressive normative development has done relatively little to prevent the further degradation of the global environment. There can be little doubt that, in the 21st century, environmental stewardship is still honoured more in the breach than in the observance.

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