Foreword

Since the end of the Cold War, neoliberal institutionalist scholarship on global environmental regimes has mushroomed. So too has constructivist scholarship on the role of norms in international politics. However, until this book arrived on the scene, no one has sought to set these interest-based and norm-based approaches against each other in order to test their ability to illuminate why and how different environmental norms take hold in some regimes and not others. Why do some regimes seek to preserve and protect some parts of nature *from* development, while others seek to wisely manage certain parts of nature *for* development? Why do other regimes allow the reckless exploitation of nature without accounting for the consequences? In this book, Gerald Nagtzaam seeks to track the fate of the three over-arching norms of environmental politics – preservation, conservation and exploitation. He shows how the international political battles to shape the international regimes on whales, mining in Antarctica and tropical timber all involved a tussle between these competing environmental norms. They also provide excellent case studies through which to assess rationalist and constructivist approaches to understanding international environmental regimes. In the course of providing a meticulous and detailed history of each of these regimes, Nagtzaam poses some hard questions for both neoliberal institutionalists and constructivists. In the end, he gives two cheers for constructivism (for the whaling and Antarctic regimes) and one cheer for neoliberalism (for the tropical forest regime). He also shows that it is not possible to give ‘three cheers’ for an integrated rationalist/constructivist explanation, given the incommensurability of each approach in terms of their unit of analysis, epistemology and method, but that working with both approaches, rather than just one, does shed more light on the complex interplay between norms and interests. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in whales, Antarctica, tropical forests or regime theory.

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