

Nicholas Stern. *A Blueprint for a Safer Planet: How to Manage Climate Change and Create a New Era of Progress and Prosperity.*

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Nicholas Stern's latest book on the economics of climate change provides an updated look at the main messages derived from the 2006 Stern Review, widely considered one of the most politically influential analyses of the topic of climate change. The book was released in mid-2009, only months prior to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's 15th Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen, and clearly set out to weigh in on critical issues under consideration in the crafting of a new international agreement.

Stern provides an overview of some of the basic climate science, which he then uses to build an economic analysis of both the roots of the climate crisis and its possible solutions. A few points distinguish this publication from the Stern Review's much longer technical study. The book updates readers on the magnitude of the climate crisis, based on the latest scientific evidence, and then points out the resultant adjustments necessary to prior analyses. The book contains a stronger political analysis than the Review, and does a remarkably good job at consistently incorporating a balanced and equitable approach to the impacts and challenges relevant to developing countries.

Stern evaluates the economics heavily—often meandering for pages beyond the grasp of his non-economist readers—but he also weighs in equally on development concerns for countries at different stages of growth, and, moreover, addresses the complexity of global political dynamics. This “balanced” approach appears in the political rhetoric of developed countries, but rarely plays out in their national policies or in the actions they take at the international level. Border carbon adjustments—applying taxes on imports of “high-carbon” goods from countries with less stringent climate change policies—are one example of a national policy that antagonizes the developing world and contradicts

political statements that developed countries should “take the lead” on climate change mitigation. There is reluctance among developed countries to commit to sufficient and sustained financing through a financial instrument with balanced decision-making and direct access for developing countries. Stern understands the concepts of historic responsibility and equity in delivery of global solutions, but his recommendations on these issues could be even stronger if taken to the level of specifics for implementation.

Stern’s style and tone indicate a keen awareness that his research and conclusions are taken into account at the highest political decision-making levels, particularly in Europe. This may explain why he seems to go out of his way in numerous parts of the book to refute the approaches and findings of other well-known economists—and especially his critics—slaying their conclusions with sharp and swift strokes. Although these internal reputational contests are tedious and best left to academic articles, the time and space dedicated to these points underline the importance of clearly standing out above the rest if you are to be the one to influence national and international decision-making.

One of the strongest aspects of the book is Stern’s repeated emphasis on equity and climate justice. He goes to great lengths to describe these issues and to incorporate them into his recommendations as a fundamental basis for action and effective results. Stern addresses equity through economics and ethics, with simple yet carefully detailed arguments. Specifically, he addresses the complex issue of developing country mitigation as necessary yet distinguished from developed country mitigation, as well as the imperative to secure and effectively deliver assistance to vulnerable countries and communities who will be hit the hardest by climate change. Such principles receive lip-service but little action in the context of global negotiations and political meetings, particularly when it comes to discussion of the economic aspects. Yet, although Stern builds a robust economic and social case for equity, and warns of the ineffectiveness of not incorporating the principle into climate decision-making, his argument concerning the consequences of not addressing climate change through a justice-based approach are not as compelling or clearly tied to his numbers on economic consequences of inaction, for example.

Stern makes a solid case for the need to address climate change collectively and then puts forward recommendations—his “blueprint”—for how to shape a workable international approach. He translates the science from prognosis into economic analysis that can then be applied to governmental policy-making, where projections, risks, costs and benefits are the language of government planning. These arguments then form

the basis of the “structure of a global deal”—an agreement that is not only feasible in economic terms for all countries, but also sustainable.

Perhaps Stern’s most important message, which was clear in the Stern Review and continues to resound throughout this book, is his pragmatic optimism that it is possible for the world to successfully address climate change. While he is quite clear about the complexity and amount of effort required from governments and citizens, he never falters from his message that the fundamental shifts in human behaviour are possible through policy-making, that investments required are available, sound, and deliverable, and that a global deal can deliver the emissions reductions necessary to stabilize our atmospheric system.

So, why is Stern’s blueprint not on the desk of every decision-maker involved in the issue, if it contains so many well-founded answers? Perhaps it is a matter of time. Or perhaps the book does not address or resolve the challenges of governance that impede governments from acting on the basis of clear evidence and sound judgment. Many of the challenges we face in solving the climate change dilemma are the same weaknesses that make our economic systems fragile and keep our development goals just beyond reach. They include a relatively young international system characterized by institutional and governance problems; insufficiently strong international compliance mechanisms that need to include both assistance and penalties; and national-level implementation stumbling blocks such as weak financial structures, corruption, political discontinuity, and varying levels of capacity, among others. Resolving these challenges is fundamental to ensure a comprehensive approach to climate change and requires political will to change along with dedicated efforts and resources over the long term. These are some of the subtler hues to our global political economy that we must face collectively and improve in order to achieve a unified and effective approach to climate change. While Stern’s book serves to further sharpen the picture of the economics, principles, and policies for climate governance, fundamental components of a broader solution on the path away from business as usual—the “blueprint”—can only be effective when the engineers and builders assiduously and responsibly carry the project through. ■

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Paul G. Harris, ed. *Climate Change and Foreign Policy: Case Studies from East to West.*

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The halting progress of international co-operation on climate change over the past two decades, coupled with the growing urgency of the need to address the causes and impacts of rising temperatures, has led to an increasing amount of literature examining the political obstacles surrounding the climate regime. Why has agreement been so difficult? If countries remain so far apart at the negotiating table, how has this been so? In this edited volume, Paul Harris and his collaborators aim to illustrate how domestic political dynamics feed into decision-making processes for a country's environmental foreign policy.

The eight chapters that form the bulk of the book each focus on one country, their authors highlighting how each country's international position on climate change has been affected by domestic dynamics. Additionally, one chapter deals with the European Union and the interplay between its environmental stance and bureaucratic influences. A final chapter shifts discussion to adaptation, exploring how climate policy interfaces with the existing foreign aid regime. While some of the case studies focus on the "usual suspects" of the international politics of climate change (China, Japan, Australia, the United States), the others draw our attention to countries that have received less attention in the English-language literature (Turkey, Hungary, Denmark, France). These chapters are largely descriptive, offering an account of how climate change foreign policy has changed (or not) over the two decades of international negotiations.

What is particularly instructive for this latter group of countries is how the authors illustrate the redefinitions of state interests over time within the country concerned. In showing how this translates into national policy on climate change—whether on the speed of accession to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, or in the spillover effect into other policy arenas—the authors provide a different perspective on climate co-operation from that which normally focuses on the big players. As a whole, the volume draws attention to the need to locate an understanding of how climate change foreign policy is made within the broader political context of the country concerned—whether it is American exceptionalism, Turkey's tension between the pulls of aspiring

Western identity and economic reality, French geopolitical independence, and so forth.

Each chapter reaches useful conclusions about how to understand the development and formation of a country's climate change policy, paying attention to preference formation, the influence of scientific information, domestic interest groups, bureaucratic actors and individual leadership, among other things. In this way, the volume questions our ability to treat foreign policy-making in unitary actor terms by tracing international policy shifts to corresponding, multi-actor shifts at the domestic political level. And of course, the interplay between the international and domestic contexts is also at the heart of this, such as the pressures of Japanese economic recession, reputational costs from the 2003 invasion of Iraq for Australia, or for Hungary, policy harmonization linked to post-Cold War European integration.

Because of the diversity of approaches across the chapters and only minimal attempts at cross-case comparison, however, the chapters are more impressive individually than they are as a collective volume. Despite offering a more conceptual treatment elsewhere of the theoretical insights that foreign policy analysis can make to understanding environmental co-operation,¹ Harris makes only minimal remarks in the introduction of the present volume about what we can draw, comparatively, from this array of cases. We can recognize the basic point that "foreign policy matters," but when some chapters base their analysis around different frameworks, whether it is discourse analysis (Australia) or path dependency (France), and use different benchmarks for comparison, such as the ozone regime (Turkey) or that for biodiversity (Hungary), there is little of general consequence that can be said about how the foreign policy of climate change is made. We end up, in short, with a laundry list of various contributing factors—some of which are undoubtedly more important in some cases than others—but little evaluation of whether any hold greater explanatory influence.

Context matters greatly, as the contributors to this volume demonstrate, and the international context cannot be divorced from the domestic when it comes to climate policy. Understanding how foreign policy is made is an important piece of the puzzle of collective action that underlies co-operation on climate change, highlighting the agency of sub-state actors as part of the complex reality of twenty-first century international politics. ■

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¹ See John Barkdull and Paul G. Harris, "Environmental Change and Foreign Policy: A Survey of Theory," *Global Environmental Politics* 2, no. 2 (2002): 63–91.

*Mary E. Pettenger, ed. The Social Construction
of Climate Change: Power, Knowledge, Norms,
Discourses.*

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The Social Construction of Climate Change seeks, in the words of its editor, to “understand the interpretations of climate change, vis-à-vis the social processes of climate change conceptualization, i.e., what it is and how its causes and consequences, and the planned responses to it, are constructed” (p. 2).

The book is divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on a “norm-centred perspective,” with the second employing a “discourse analytical perspective.” Whatever the planned division of labour, however, the most readily noticeable difference between the two sections lies in the adherence by the contributors to the first part to what can be called conventional constructivist approaches (à la Wendt), and the embrace of more critical versions of constructivist thought in the second. Indeed, the diversity of approaches employed by the various contributors, between but also within sections, forms one of the strengths of the volume.

The book is at its best when it is at its most descriptive. The chapters in the first half plot the evolution of a variety of norms associated with climate change in a number of developed states, including the United States, the Netherlands, and Japan. All of these accounts are accessibly written, which is important for those not well versed in constructivism’s often opaque prose. The chapter by Loren R. Cass, which focuses on measuring the salience of several key environmental norms in British, German, and American climate change debates, provides a useful and replicable model for measuring norm salience in domestic contexts, thereby opening up the possibility for comparable studies across a wider range of case studies. Other chapters also provide interesting descriptions of specific norms within their national contexts and represent valuable empirical contributions, which are likely to prove useful foundations for future research.

The second section of the book delves deeper into debates about climate change and seeks to explore the underlying discourses which structure them at the local, national, and international levels. While many of these accounts are intriguing, insightful, and well written, some of the

contributors undermine their own efforts by writing in such an inaccessible and unstructured way that at times only the most determined reader will be able to puzzle out the full meaning of their argumentation. This unfortunate tendency is most present in William D. Smith's chapter, which deals with Totonac cosmology as a form of climate change knowledge, but crops up in other chapters as well. Even more problematic than dense verbiage and distended argumentation, however, is the unresolved tension that exists between, on the one hand, some contributors' attempts at explanation and understanding and, on the other, their undisciplined meandering between the two. Such tension is not unique to this volume and pervades much constructivist international relations scholarship; however, certain claims advanced in the second half of the book throw some of the associated challenges into fairly sharp relief.

For instance, in their chapter on the discourse of territorialization, Matthew Paterson and Johannes Stripple argue that certain "discourses serve to structure concrete policy developments, and illustrate how they reterritorialize climate politics." While they are never explicit in doing so, Paterson and Stripple advance a number of essentially causal claims that effectively move them out of the realm of understanding and into explanation. This is not necessarily a problem; it simply requires them to develop a causal account of their claim, operationalise it, consider some alternative explanations for the alleged effect, devise a methodology to test their account against its rivals, and provide empirical evidence supporting their account over the aforementioned alternatives. True, Paterson and Stripple might abjure such explanatory pretensions and claim to be only seeking understanding, but such a position sits uncomfortably with their claim to be exploring "the ways that ... territorial framing is productive of concrete policies" (p. 149).

Causally relating a discourse to events in a methodologically rigorous way remains one of the most difficult tasks for the social scientist, but it is too important a task to avoid. While this book provides a number of credible narratives concerning the influence of norms and discourses, when it strays into causal explanation it generally fails to show why constructivist accounts are more valid than credible alternative narratives. There are some partial exceptions, with Myanna Lahsen's chapter coming closest to substantiating her claims through the use of interviews. Nonetheless, despite these weaknesses, the work collected in this volume does provide a strong foundation of insightful empirical work upon which additional efforts can hopefully be built. ■

Mike Hulme. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity.*

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MILAN ILNYCKYJ

In addition to being an observable physical phenomenon, climate change has taken on a broad range of social, political, and even theological meanings. Mike Hulme's *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* seeks to chart out the major lines of argumentation that have emerged around the subject, as well as to consider the implications that flow from them, both in terms of climate policy and in terms of broader matters of ethics and public policy. Ultimately, Hulme argues that "climate change should be seen as an intellectual resource around which our collective and personal identities and projects can form and take shape" (p. 326). The range of discourses Hulme considers is restricted to a particular segment of the overall climate change debate—specifically, those contributors to the debate who accept three scientific touchstones: that greenhouse gases affect the climate system, the recorded rise in global temperatures, and the possibility of non-linear responses in the climate system. Restricting the scope of consideration in this way allows Hulme to exclude viewpoints that have no scientific basis. However, doing so also precludes examination of all relevant actors in the global political discussion about climate change policy. While Hulme effectively examines the social, cultural, and political aspects of climate change, he may inappropriately downplay the observed and possible future physical consequences resulting from greenhouse gas emissions.

Hulme's book considers the climate change debate through the lens of science, ethics (especially religious ethics), economics, psychology and the perception of risk, "development" as variously understood, and governance. Each chapter provides a good survey of different viewpoints along with insightful commentary. Hulme considers the important and contested role that science has taken on in the political sphere, with actors holding various positions all defending theirs as having a scientific basis. He argues convincingly that "[p]olicing the representation of scientific knowledge is a contentious activity" (p. 95). For the most part, Hulme's approach is academic and descriptive, though his argument turns surprisingly prescriptive on the question of population and

the environment. Notably, his examination does not consider those who engage in the climate change debate in dishonest or self-serving ways, seeking to maintain the status quo by creating the false sense that the science is deeply uncertain. Arguably, understanding the role of these actors is important when it comes to understanding public confusion about the climate issue, as well as the continuing lack of meaningful political action. Relatively few politicians or members of the general public would automatically accept Hulme's three touchstones as correct, partially because of the active misinformation still being disseminated.¹

The book distinguishes itself most from others in the genre by devoting considerable attention to ethical issues, considered primarily from the perspective of religious ethics. Hulme notes the exhortations by religious officials and documents to act as stewards of the planet, and considers disagreement about what that obligation means and how it should be put into practice. However, he does not consider how climate change relates to the problem of theodicy: why a benevolent deity concerned with human welfare would provide in fossil fuels such an ample and easily employed energy source, but build in a potentially devastating caveat that would not be understood until several hundred years after they entered widespread use. Nor does he consider that religious belief might diminish concern about climate change, since an orderly universe with a creator seems less likely to allow humanity to capriciously extinguish itself than one governed only by chance and physical laws.

At times, the book seems overly eager to link different views on different issues as if they formed comprehensive philosophies, for instance by suggesting that those who view societal organization in a certain way almost inevitably have similar views about the relationships between humanity and nature. For instance, it is not clear why those of an "egalitarian" leaning would generally view nature as "ephemeral," or why those with a "hierarchical" view of public policy would see it as "perverse" or "tolerant." This, along with the extremely short shrift given to secular forms of ethical reasoning, sometimes gives the impression of a lack of nuance. The link between non-moral facts that people believe about the world (such as about whether climate naturally returns to a stable state after being disturbed) and the high level ethical, political, and philosophical positions they affirm is likely not so clear-cut and determinative.

While Hulme systematically rejects the view of climate change as a technical problem to be solved, he does not provide adequate evidence to support this position. It seems logically possible that carbon-intensive forms of energy generation could be replaced with carbon-neutral ones, and deforestation stopped, without any fundamental change in world-

views or in economic or political structures. For instance, efforts like those by Google.org to produce renewable energy that is cheaper than coal (their RE<C initiative) suggest that there is a small chance that such positive outcomes could arise primarily through technological development, rather than being mandated through government policy.

Hulme seems to overemphasize psychology at the expense of attention to the physical characteristics of the climate system. While Hulme argues that considering climate change as primarily a physical phenomenon risks giving it “near infinite plasticity” (p. 28) there is also a risk that an overly psychological examination will fail to give due weight to the serious physical realities humanity is confronting. For instance, despite how the possibility of runaway climate change relates psychologically to “myths” about the apocalypse, it is also a real physical possibility independent of human ways of thinking. Indeed, it is something that could potentially have been caused unwittingly before any climate science was known. While examining human psychology can provide insights into why people respond to climate change in the ways they do, the discussion risks being ungrounded and overly relativistic if consideration of physical likelihoods of different outcomes is not included. Hulme’s reflexive rejection of the possibility of catastrophic climate change causes him to downplay the harm that could result if humanity fails to restabilize the climate system. If that assumption is rejected, the possibility arises that his examination of the climate change debate does not accurately consider the full extent of the problem. That said, Hulme’s examination is a valuable contribution to the overall academic discussion of climate change. By revealing the many ways in which those who agree on certain scientific premises continue to disagree on what ought to be done about climate change, Hulme demonstrates the roles that fact, philosophy, and ideology play in determining the human response to our changing atmosphere and warming planet. ■

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¹ One recent book focused on this phenomenon is James Hoggan with Richard Littlemore, *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009).