Critical Dialogue

Democratizing Global Climate Governance. By Hayley Stevenson and John S. Dryzek. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 256 pp. 18.99£ (paperback), 55.00£ (hardback).
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— Frank Biermann, *Utrecht University*

Thirty years of national and international climate policy have not led to sufficient reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The intergovernmental negotiation process, in particular, is widely criticized. While thousands of diplomats, activists, business leaders and scientists annually convene for the conferences of the parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, progress at these gatherings is painfully slow, oscillating between outright failures—such as the 2009 conference in Copenhagen—and rays of hope, such as the conference in December 2015 in Paris.

In this situation, Hayley Stevenson and John S. Dryzek's *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* shows a way forward in their call for a more deliberative and democratic global governance system. They draw in their masterful study on a large body of theoretical literature—largely developed or inspired by Dryzek and his colleagues at the Center for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance—and bring these ideas to bear on one of the most wicked problems of world politics: collectively reducing greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonizing the global economy.

Democratizing Global Climate Governance combines rich and insightful theoretical, empirical, and reform-oriented analysis. It offers an extensive argument that lays out the basic tenets of deliberative democracy and the components of a "deliberative system" for global climate governance (Chapter 2); identifies major discourses that have been prevalent in a number of international and transnational institutions, including "mainstream sustainability," "expansive sustainability," "limits," and "green radicalism" (Chapter 3); and assesses the (rather limited) deliberative qualities of multilateral climate negotiations (Chapter 4). Stevenson and Dryzek then expand their analysis beyond the confines of intergovernmental settings and investigate the deliberative qualities of novel types of networked governance, which are at times advanced as alternatives to traditional intergovernmentalism, such as the Clean Technology Fund, the Clean Technology Initiative's Private Financing Advisory Network, and the private network Verified Carbon Standard (Chapter 5). Perhaps surprisingly for proponents of such networked alternatives to intergovernmental institutions, these mechanisms also do not seem to fare much better in terms of deliberative quality. In Chapter 6, Stevenson and Dryzek focus on the transmission of discourses in the "public space"—the free debate among civil society and other actors—to the "empowered space" of intergovernmental decision-making, with the overall conclusion that such transmission is often limited, unequal, and imbalanced. Chapter 7 discusses the question of accountability, with a view to both intergovernmental regimes and networked governance. These six theoretical and analytical chapters then form the basis for a set of policy proposals that stand, in some ways, at the heart of *Democratizing Global Climate Governance,* offering a host of novel, useful, and broadly convincing ideas for how to move forward in global climate policy, ranging from the exploration of the role that "mini-publics" could play in improving the deliberative quality of governance, to the need of developing deliberative (as opposed to punitive) accountability mechanisms, and the proposal of a deliberative "Chamber of Discourses" within multilateral negotiations or networked governance systems (Chapters 8 and 9).

Overall, *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* is an important contribution to current debates in the field. By applying theoretical tenets of deliberative democracy to a particularly intractable problem of world politics, the book contributes to both political theory and policy practice. Stevenson and Dryzek's list of proposals on how to democratize global climate governance almost takes the form of a handout for decision-makers, providing vital and often very detailed suggestions for how to do better. By and large, the proposals developed in *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* seem compatible with, and complementary to, many other existing policy proposals in the field, including arguably my own blueprint of institutional reform elaborated in *Earth System Governance: World Politics in the Anthropocene* (MIT Press, 2014), and the policy outline that I published with 33 colleagues ahead of the 2012 U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development (Biermann et al., "Navigating the

Anthropocene: Improving Earth System Governance," *Science*, 16 March 2012).

My comments on *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* have therefore less to do with what the authors write and more with what they neglect.

For one, *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* is still predominantly informed by experiences in industrialized societies, often relying on examples from Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, or Denmark. A research desideratum in this field is hence a more systematic expansion of experimentation and analysis to other parts of the world, such as Africa, South Asia, or China. Such biases are also a problem with a view to the "public space" at the global level, including global civil society. For instance, recent research has shown that the highly promoted online stakeholder dialogues around the 2012 U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development—which could be seen as example of a global deliberation in "public space"—were heavily biased towards participants from just a few countries, with a particular bias towards English-speaking countries. In one online stakeholder dialogue that my colleagues and I analyzed, nearly 50% of all "voters" came from four English-speaking countries that account for only 6.2% of the world's population (UK, USA, Canada, and Australia), while Chinese and Indians represented only 1.7% of the participants (Sénit, Kalfagianni, and Biermann, "Cyber-Democaracy?." *Global Governance,* forthcoming.). Recent research has also emphasized the vast disparities in funding for, and hence influence within, environmental nongovernmental organizations, generally seen as core elements of "global civil society." Given its relatively high donations, even small countries such as the Netherlands have managed to acquire permanent seats in the decision-making bodies of environmental NGOs (Kathrin Dombrowski, *Bridging the Democratic Gap: Can NGOs Link Local Communities to International Environmental Institutions?* London School of Economics and Political Science, 2013).

Stevenson and Dryzek are of course aware of such disparities and frequently acknowledge biases within and among countries in their book. I was particularly impressed, for example, by their detailed and refreshing analysis of Bolivia's political role as the leading proponent of an anti-capitalist "green radicalism" discourse. And yet, how deliberative democracy in "public space" will function at the global level remains an important conceptual and practical challenge for this line of research, given a situation where—to list only a few of the challenges—842 million people have insufficient access to food, 61% of all people do not use the internet (including 84% of Africans and 68% of people in the Asia/Pacific region), and the richest 20% of all people account for 76% of global private consumption.

A further challenge might lie in the transfer of the notion of "discourses" from an analytical category of political theory to a political category in institutional redesign. When discourses are unfairly represented or insufficiently respected in political practice, how likely is it that mainstream political actors will want to change this outcome in international negotiations? Given that for example Bolivia and Cuba's discourse of anti-capitalist "green radicalism" is hardly represented in "empowered space," how could this be ameliorated by institutional reforms? And how would the discourses that are to be more fairly represented be identified in the first place?

At times, *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* could also be seen as more traditional than it seems at first stance. For example, the analysis of "public space" often revolves around the study of side events at diplomatic conferences and the influence of global civil society on the "empowered space" of the intergovernmental negotiation hall. One might question, however, whether such side events have any significance in the first place, and whether they correctly represent a global "public space." As another example, Stevenson and Dryzek propose to replace the chair of the intergovernmental "conference of the parties" by a professional facilitator. While this might be a sensible proposal, it is hardly likely to revolutionize climate governance, also given that conference chairs are usually highly experienced ambassadors with a long record of intergovernmental negotiations. Further, one might wonder whether the distinction between empowered space and public space, fundamental to much writing in deliberative democracy theory, is not increasingly outdated in itself, given that loci of authority have migrated from U.N.-based negotiations to novel private governance networks, and civil society actors have taken on rule-making and rule-implementing functions.

In the end, like much other writing in the field, *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* also remains close to piece-meal incrementalism, despite its at times fundamental critique of current politics. Deliberative democracy is, as the authors repeatedly argue, less an ideal state than a slow process by which international politics can be made more democratic and deliberative, and by that also more effective. Also deliberative democracy is, to cite Max Weber's metaphor, a process of slowly drilling holes into thick planks of wood. This does not mean that far-reaching visions from political scientists are superfluous. Political science is needed, among others, to provide the bold blueprints of how institutional structures could be revised, based on a careful analysis of the current shortcomings and political constraints. As such, *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* is an outstanding, important example of a bold theoretical vision of better governance—here in the form of deliberative democracy—combined with

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a detailed set of proposals on how such vision could be approached by incremental institutional reform.

Response to Frank Biermann's review of *Democratizing Global Climate Governance*

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— John S. Dryzek

Confronted with any failing governance system of crucial global importance, it is important to be both critical and realistic. While recognizing our critical impetus—and the validity of the broadly deliberative view of politics in which it is grounded—Biermann faults the analysis in *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* for occasionally conceding too much to realism, with the result that some of the proposed reforms look too limited to make much of a difference. It is true that some of our more marginal suggestions (such as a facilitator rather than a chair for international negotiations) would in and of themselves make only a marginal difference. However they should be read in the context of our more thoroughgoing suggestions, such as the reconceptualization of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a meta-governance institution—and indeed the need for disruption of the system through movement activism.

If all our suggestions were followed, would that prove adequate? The answer is we do not know, but in a way that is precisely the point: What global earth system governance needs above all is a more reflexive capacity to question and correct its own shortcomings, and we believe a deliberative approach is well-placed to foster such a capacity. In this light, Biermann's own set of mostly multilateral prescriptions, while perfectly plausible, may involve jumping ahead too quickly and too confidently. The problem is that when it comes to climate governance in particular, time is short, so any learning that does take place cannot do so at a leisurely pace.

Biermann also suggests that our deliberative systems analysis does not easily apply when it comes to kinds of governance where divisions between public space and empowered space are blurred. We address such forms of networked governance at length; their problem is precisely that divisions are blurred, such that they generally lack any public space at a critical distance from empowered space. That is the main reason such initiatives are currently not making enough difference.

Applying deliberative democracy in an unequal world is of course a challenge, but one that is increasingly being met. Experience shows that the capacity to deliberate is a universal human capability, it is just a matter of figuring out how to involve the poor and marginalized more effectively. In these terms, successes at the local level are much easier to identify than at the global level—but we are trying, and the fault for the moment lies more in the recalcitrance of global institutions than in the efforts of deliberative democrats.

More important than the specifics developed by either Biermann or Stevenson and myself is the larger, urgent enterprise of making global environmental governance more effective, egalitarian, and legitimate, and in recognizing this urgency there is no difference between us and Biermann. I hope he would join me in urging that such pressing matters be covered more extensively in the pages of *Perspectives on Politics* and elsewhere. To adapt Weber's famous comment (noted by Biermann), global environmental politics must now involve the strong and fast boring of hard boards, engaged by many hands.

Earth System Governance: World Politics in the Anthropocene. By Frank Biermann. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014. 260p.

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— John S. Dryzek, *University of Canberra*

Earth system governance is an increasingly popular concept that captures multi-level governance in social-ecological systems, a large multi-national project that joins hundreds of researchers, and the title of this book. Frank Biermann is the link between these three—the instigator of the field, the Director of the Project, and the author of this book. Not all of those who have joined the project would endorse the specific positions taken in *Earth System Governance* (as Biermann allows), or its conceptual scheme, but all would recognize the significance and pressing nature of the topics this book tackles. The Anthropocene in the subtitle connotes both urgency and novelty; this is the name for the emerging epoch of human-induced instability in the Earth system, the successor to the unusually stable Holocene in which human civilization began (though for most of the book the Anthropocene and its challenge fade into the background, and most of the analysis does not depend crucially on the concept).

Biermann defines earth system governance as "the sum of the formal and informal rule systems and actor networks at all levels of human society that are set up to steer societies toward preventing, mitigating, and adapting to environmental change and earth system transformation" (p. 9). Such systems and networks can be analyzed empirically at any number of levels, but Biermann's emphasis is normative and global, a "realistic utopianism" (p. 13) that develops proposals for institutional change. The "normative context" is given by Gro Harlem Brundtland's classic 1987 definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 9), which enables attention to justice and legitimacy, as well as

effectiveness in confronting social-ecological challenges. For Biermann, governance needs to be credible (in terms of the commitments states in particular make to it), stable, adaptable, inclusive, and with responsibilities that are differentiated according to the capacities of different actors.

Having established this basic orientation, Biermann attends to questions of agency, architecture, accountability and legitimacy, allocation, and adaptiveness in global governance. For Biermann, an agent is an "authoritative actor" (p. 48), architecture is institutional structure, allocation is really about distributive justice (but that would interrupt the alliteration), and adaptiveness refers not to adaptive governance in general, but rather to adaptation governance in the sense of coping with the negative effects of environmental change. A chapter is devoted to each of the questions. Democratic values come to the fore in Chapter 5 on accountability and legitimacy, where Biermann explores ideas for different sorts of global assemblies, as well as the variety of accountability mechanisms. Chapter 6 on allocation is limited by its emphasis on two views on justice: one libertarian, the other egalitarian and cosmopolitan. Specific governance proposals (such as emission trading schemes) are then assessed in light of these views. Here Biermann tries to figure out what adherents of the two views would think, as opposed to what they actually do think about such proposals; some of the extrapolations (for example, that libertarians would support emissions trading) are contestable. In addition, libertarianism and cosmopolitan egalitarianism do not necessarily define the ends of a spectrum on which all normative theories of justice can be located—where for example would one fit the capabilities account of justice as developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum? Their theory is quite influential in the politics of development, and starting to be applied to ecological questions.

Though he is careful to distinguish governance from science-based management, Biermann's prescriptions for earth system governance are mostly centralized and multilateral. Calling for "new forms of multilateralism," Biermann declares that "there is no way around strong and effective international institutions" (p. 207). In taking this position, Biermann rejects the arguments of those who celebrate polycentric, decentralized, or minilateral initiatives, or public/private networked governance. Such arguments (associated with people such as Elinor Ostrom, David Victor, and Matthew Hoffmann) are especially prominent when it comes to global climate governance, as analysts search for alternatives to prolonged impasse in multilateral negotiations. For Biermann, decentralization means only "fragmentation" and partial and ineffective solutions. So any arrangements (such as clubs of nation-states) with small membership would have to have extraordinarily ambitious targets to make any global difference. Such arrangements reinforce the most powerful actors in the international system, and they undermine global negotiation of targets and measures to achieve them.

Biermann is quite right that the various decentralized initiatives are currently inadequate when it comes to confronting global ecological problems—let alone the larger challenge of the Anthropocene. The trouble is that existing multilateral efforts are also failing, while the sheer number of international environmental agreements is large—at the time of writing (mid 2015) the last demonstrably effective major multilateral agreement was the 1987 Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer, and it took a quarter of a century for measurable improvement in the ozone layer to result from that. Biermann would reply that his analysis is prescriptive: In this light, the problem is that we do not have enough effective centralization and multilateralism. But his polycentric critics might reply that we do not have enough effective decentralization either: If Biermann is allowed his realistic utopia, why aren't the decentralists allowed theirs too?

Biermann's specific prescriptions include the establishment of a World Environment Organization on a par with the World Trade Organization; a permanent Global Environmental Assessment Commission; a high-level United Nations Sustainable Development Council to integrate earth system governance with other areas of governance; qualified majority voting as an alternative to impasse-producing unanimity requirements in multilateral negotiations and assemblies; United Nations trusteeship over the high seas, Antarctica, and space; and limitations on national sovereignty under ecological governance. Biermann gets more specific still when it comes to (for example) how a global fund to assist countries coping with climate migrants (displaced from their homes as a consequence of climate change) might be financed and managed. To get from here to there, he believes that "interaction management and incremental change" (p. 94) are not enough. More dramatic moments of multilateral institutional creation will also be necessary, in a "constitutional moment'"(p. 210) of the sort not seen in global governance since the aftermath of the second World War. Yet a critical juncture of the kind that enabled global institutional transformation after 1945 does not seem likely when it comes to global social-ecological systems; the problem is that catastrophic tipping points or state shifts in social-ecological systems that look sudden in geological time are quite slow-moving when it comes to the timescale on which dominant political institutions and practices currently operate. Moreover it is surely the task of earth system governance to anticipate and prevent such shifts.

The package of institutional reforms Biermann proposes is in one sense not especially radical—its equivalent already exists in the area of global economic governance. This non-radical aspect helps render Biermann's institutional utopia "realistic." Yet the fact that global economic

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governance got there first is also a source of major problems for Biermann's vision that he addresses only very partially in lamenting fragmentation across economic and environmental governance and in calling for restrictions on trade to be allowed on environmental grounds. The more important challenge involves the degree to which global economic governance, the neoliberal political economy in which it is so firmly embedded, and their supporting discourse imprison both states and other arenas of global governance—including environmental governance. Figuring out how to escape this prison should surely be high on the earth system governance agenda. It is by no means clear that integration with, as opposed to escape from, global economic governance would be the better first step.

More generally, it seems there are alternative plausible pathways and alternative institutional specifics to the set prescribed by Biermann (I have mentioned polycentric and decentralized approaches, there are others). Currently we do not know which would work best, or even which would work well enough. So one crucial precondition for effective global institutional reconstruction is surely the development of an enhanced reflexive capacity in the processes of global (meta) governance—before we rush to any detailed set of institutional prescriptions.

As Biermann recognizes, there is currently a massive gap between the reality of global environmental governance and the requirements identified by natural and social scientists who have taken the condition of the earth system seriously. Biermann has provided a thorough and credible program for starting to bridge that gap. Even those who do not share his prescriptions will have to grapple with the analysis that underpins them; *Earth System Governance* is now a clear and standard reference point, and as such should be required reading for all those who care about the condition of the earth system and its governance.

Response to John S. Dryzek's review of *Earth System Governance: World Politics in the Anthropocene*

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— Frank Biermann

John S. Dryzek's review is valuable and constructive on numerous points. It clearly points to needs for further elaboration and research, for example, on the justice implications of earth system governance or on the question of how to raise its democratic quality and reflective potential (an area where Dryzek himself has laid much of the groundwork over the last decades). I also agree with Dryzek's point that more attention is needed on the role of economic interests in earth system governance, from the study of capitalist economies as drivers of the Anthropocene to the discursive power of business-related interests.

Other comments invite further clarifications of key concepts. For instance, I do not agree that my argument necessarily supports a stronger "centralization" of governance. As I write in Chapter 2, "Global stewardship for the planet is different from centralized management. [It] must be based on cooperation, coordination, and consensus building among actors at all levels [and] must include complex architectures of interlinked institutions and decision-making procedures, but also different forms of collaboration, such as partnerships and networks." I have no doubt that different governance systems need to coexist at different levels and in different functional areas. Yet what is important, as one part of a broader reform agenda, is to strengthen the effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability of multilateral decision-making. My focus is here less on centralization but rather on inclusiveness—in rejecting dominant strands in the literature that call for (U.S.-led) "mini-clubs" of a few powerful countries that would exclude poorer and smaller countries under the guise of decentralization, deregulation and debureaucratization. I thus also do not seek to argue against "polycentric" governance, and indeed use this term in my book. Global governance has been marked by different poles of authority and power for long, and is likely to remain so. Yet what is important, I argue, is to strengthen intergovernmental decision-making by a careful redesign of international institutions, all within a broader governance architecture that works as well through local authorities, private actors, transnational arrangements, and so forth.

A recurrent concern with all writing on policy advocacy and redesigning institutions remains the political feasibility of reform propositions and the often-cited lack of "political will" among decision-makers. These are important considerations indeed, and counterweighing forces must be carefully included in the institutional analysis. Yet we also ought to resist current strands in political science that plainly reject policy advocacy with reference to overwhelming capitalist forces, persistent political inertia, or the impossibility of finding any global agreement. The advent of the Anthropocene, as a highly volatile epoch in planetary evolution that is shaped by accelerating human influences, changes also the context of political science, which needs to engage more forcefully with the search for governance systems that better cope with the new political context. In this, Dryzek and I share the same basic motivation and commitment to exploring innovative ways towards more effective, equitable, and legitimate earth system governance—despite our (maybe substantial) disagreements about the right direction to pursue.