

Globalization and the Environment

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Introduction

Globalization has many dimensions. My talk will explore some of those dimensions and their implications for the environment. I will also consider some of the social, political, and economic consequences that can stem from environmental deterioration of a regional or global scale. My purpose is to examine the many unresolved debates about globalization and the environment. I do not provide answers to the debates, but at times, I may express personal opinion about some of them. Instead, I suggest that as a global community it is important for us to reflect on what globalization is and what its environmental implications might be.

Globalization is not new. It has been going on for centuries. We have experienced periods of struggles for global empire—the Romans, the Greeks, the British, the Russians. We have twice witnessed the horrors of world war, and we have twice established international decision-making bodies (the League of Nations, the United Nations) in an effort to promote greater mutual understanding among nations and peoples of the world.

But globalization is in the news today. Perhaps, that is because the pace of globalization has accelerated in the past century, and even more so, in the last decade. The end of the Cold War has made dialogue possible among nations and regions of the world that formerly viewed each other as enemies. We are now working together as nations to promote free trade, to punish genocide, and to protect the environment.

But not everyone views globalization positively. Washington, D.C. is preparing for the next meeting of the IMF leaders scheduled for the end of September. The city and the federal government are negotiating to determine who should pay the very expensive bill for the police protection that the city considers necessary for the meeting. Some 200,000 people are expected to converge on the city to protest globalization and the IMF, and if recent meetings are any clue, then protests could turn violent. Following the tragic death of a protestor in Genoa, Italy during the G-8 meeting, cities are becoming nervous about hosting meetings that might be associated with globalization.

Why? What is so scary about globalization? Why is it eliciting this kind of protest? The Cold War has ended. Democracy has prevailed. Free market economics are widely accepted. Shouldn't this new global situation be supportive of globalization? Isn't globalization and an ever closer world what we all want?

The institutional, political, and social manifestations of globalization are all around us. The pace of institutional development at the international and global level has really been quite astounding. The list of global institutions keeps getting larger—the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the ILO, ILS... There are also a growing number of international laws and agreements regulating airplane travel, fishing activities, oil dumping at sea, how we fight wars, protection of the ozone layer, and the list goes on.

Considering the rapid pace of change around us it is good for us to step back and ask what globalization means for the world community, for individual nations, specific regions, and even for you and me as individuals. We need to begin to ask what globalization, in all its manifestations, means for governance, freedom, legitimacy, and accountability. Finally, we must think about what globalization means for the very planet we live on. Will globalization help us to protect the environment as some argue? Or is globalization itself a threat to the environment?

In this talk, I would like to discuss what I consider to be some of the most important relationships between globalization and the environment. I do not consider globalization to be either good or bad. Instead, I think of globalization as a process that will continue, and is in many ways inevitable.

But I do think that globalization should not be taken for granted. We must strive to understand it and consider its implications. There may be reason to try to redirect or reshape its normative or institutional forms. There may be times when we should slow down the development of new global institutions in order to have the time to understand its implications—for matters of governance, freedom, efficiency, equality...and for the environment. We may also need time as societies to adapt to new ways of doing things. Societies are slow to accept change. If they do not accept an international agreement, then it will also be difficult to enforce compliance. On the other hand, there may also be times when we should work to hasten the development of global agreements or norms—such as those which protect our planet from harm.

Forms of Globalization

Globalization has many forms:

Its economic manifestation include:

- 1.) There has been globalization of trade—a process that has roots extending back into colonial times but that is being accelerated by the creation of new regional and global economic blocs—examples include, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, the European Union,

- and the World Trade Organization. These agreements and institutions have been formed in order to remove trade barriers and protectionist policies that inhibit the flow of goods and services among nations.
- 2.) There has also been a globalization of finance—large banks, brokerage firms, corporations, and some individuals—like Bill Gates or George Soros-- are now so rich that they can move huge sums of money around the world in a moments time. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asia Development Bank are all engaged as multilateral financial banks in development and lending decisions in the debt ridden third world.

The globalization of trade and of finance are developments that in recent years have led to massive anti-globalization demonstrations (the battle for Seattle; death in Genoa).

Its cultural manifestations include:

- 3.) Globalization of culture or what some might call “Americanization”. On the positive side, this includes the spread of certain cultural, social, and political norms, such as the spread of democracy; the emerging but not yet fully accepted norm of citizen (NGO) participation in environmental decision making; and the enhancement of the position of women in society. It also includes the development of a common youth culture, a shared language of movies, theater, and the Chinese food in Iowa and American food in Beijing. There has also been a globalization of consumerism—the worldwide presence of McDonalds, coca cola, Toyotas, plastic shopping bags, and throw away cameras—are part of an emerging global culture that places new burdens on the global environment.arts, a shared understanding of music. These are all elements that can help bring people of the world closer together.

On the other hand, such globalization can lead to cultural loss and architectural conformity. Hotels around the world basically look the same. You can eat

Its technological forms include:

- 4.) The globalization of communication—a development that began with the post (mail service) but that has been transformed by the world wide web. This globalization of communication has facilitated the exchange of information and ideas among groups regarding environmental problems. It can also facilitate the activities of corporations.
- 5.) The globalization of travel—it is no longer unusual for individuals to travel overseas. Distances have become shorter.

Its political implications include:

- 6.) The globalization of political actors. No longer are politics conducted simply within nation states. Instead there are now multinational corporations, coalitions of economic interests, international NGOs, coalitions of NGOs, international organizations, international labor groups, and so forth which struggle to influence policy making not only domestically, but also in other nations, in regional institutions (like the EU), or at the global level
- 7.) The globalization of policy making—as can be seen within the halls of the United Nations, in the annual meetings of the G-8, in the rapid development of international organizations and international agreements—there are over 900 international environmental agreements, and in the development of international law.

Debates about Globalization

What should we make of this globalization?

Many see globalization—the spread of a global culture, the strengthening of financial and economic interdependence, and the diffusion of knowledge, technology, and norms—as positive for society and the environment. According to this logic, globalization brings people and cultures closer together. We can now easily travel long distances in a short amount of time and be in different cultures. As the world becomes smaller we can work together, play together, learn from each other, teach each other. Globalization makes far away places seem less strange, less exotic. It gives us common points of reference. It reduces inefficiencies. It promotes interdependence. It is a positive development that we should encourage. It will remove the artificial boundaries established by the nation state and allow local cultures to flourish. It will tie societies together—thus, reducing the potential for conflict among peoples.

The late Julian Simon was a strong believer in the technological dimensions of globalization. So is his protégé, the former Greenpeace activist turned scholar, Bjorn Lomborg. They both argue that the spread of modern technology, science, regulations, and the like are helping to raise living standards, and over time, this is improving health care and sanitation. Through developments in medicine, we have wiped out some deadly diseases—like polio and have controlled others; fewer women are dying in child birth, fewer infants are dying in infancy. Air pollution control technology has disseminated and thus, the air is far more breathable in many of the world's major cities than it was a century ago. Life expectancy is growing in most parts of the world. Their argumentation follows the assumption that economic development—which can be enhanced by globalization—will improve economic conditions and that this will reduce human suffering, pollution, and environmental degradation.

Yet, not everyone agrees with this logic. Critics of this view point to the globalization of finance and trade as a factor in the growing differential in wealth between the North and the South. Globalization is not benefiting all groups equally. Rather, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. When two billion people live in abject poverty in

the world, they argue, it is hard to talk of the benefits of globalization. It is a fallacy to talk about the improving quality of life.

Even Lomborg—unusual among environmentalists for his optimism-- agrees that there are problems associated with globalization. The spread of AIDS is a problem that we have failed to overcome. The growth in wealth and consumption—which has led to growing dependence on the automobile, use of air travel, and appliances requiring energy—is contributing to global climate change.

With globalization of consumer lifestyles, consumption levels are increasing both in the rich countries and in the transition states. This adds yet more pressures to the global environment as more people are able to heat their homes, enjoy refrigerators, or ride motor scooters or cars. The globalization of consumer cultures may improve the quality of life, but at what expense to the global environment?

Globalization has raised many fears—some of them valid. There are those who think globalization is little more than a new form of imperialism—a process that is manipulated by a few wealthy countries at the expense of developing countries. While I do not join this camp of skeptics, I do agree with those who raise concerns about the lack of democratic accountability in many international institutions. There are many valid concerns that can be raised about globalization and what it means for labor, health, and the environment.

The EU –Lessons for Global Institutions

The European Union provides some interesting lessons to think about that have some relevance to debates about globalization. The European Union is a new experiment in global politics. It is an effort to create a supranational structure of decision making that works in parallel with the nation state. New EU institutions have been created, including a rotating presidency, a European Council, the Commission, and a European Parliament. Essentially, a supranational government is now in place in the EU and this is where many policy decisions are made for the 15 member states of the Union.

The European states initially moved to integrate in an effort to bring peace and stability to a continent that for centuries had only known war. They began by integrating some of their most basic industries—coal and steel. They then began to remove trade barriers and to promote free trade. Much like critics of globalization today argue that globalization has negative consequences for labor and the environment, in the early stages of the development of the European Economic Community, critics argued that trade was being promoted in Europe at the expense of other social and environmental concerns. In response to such pressures, slowly, the EU began to develop laws and institutions in the social, labor, health, and environmental realms as well. Some of these regulations have put a check on free trade.

The EU grew from the kind of free trade regime that we are now promoting at the global level to one that extends to include protections for society and the environment. There are now thousands of EU laws regulating activities that affect the environment.

There have also been many debates about whether a regional institution like the EU (or NAFTA) improves environmental quality or reduces it. The argument that regional institutions could be bad for the environment is basically that countries with high environmental standards are forced to lower their environmental protection requirements in order to work together with countries that have weaker standards. In other words, the formation of a regional institution pushes states down to the least common denominator.

The flip side to this argument is that countries with more experience with environmental protection and pollution control can through an institution like the EU help to pull up the level of environmental protection in developing countries. Indeed, if you look at the actions of would be accession states—those countries that want to join the EU—we see that they are indeed working to improve their domestic environmental regulations in order to bring them up to levels found within the EU. It is also noteworthy that Spain—considered a developing country within the EU—is now the world’s second largest producer of wind energy after Germany—a country considered an environmental pace setter internationally.

An institution that the EU has adopted that is of interest for the global level as well is the “subsidiarity principle”—the idea that policy making should occur at the lowest level possible. That is, policy should only be made at the EU level, when it can not be done at the local level. The EU also has many regulations allowing countries with higher environmental standards to maintain those standards as long as they are not simply put in place to act as a trade barrier—a form of protectionism.

My impression is that the EU experience suggests that on the whole—the balance has been positive for the environment. Whether or not this extends to the global level, however, still needs to be considered. The culture of the EU is much greener than the culture of many other parts of the world. The Green Parties that are found throughout most EU countries and in the EU parliament, help to maintain pro-environmental pressures in policy making. Is there a sufficiently large green community at the global level to assure similar kinds of citizen pressure on global institutions to protect the environment?

The EU experience provide many relevant lessons for the global community. We should learn from the EU as a global community. It is important for us to discuss and determine whether or not, and under what circumstances, there should be limits on national sovereignty. This is especially true in cases when national actions can lead to large-scale environmental threats or destruction. As an American, it has not escaped my attention, that many Europeans have questioned the right of the US to abandon the Kyoto Protocol because of its own national economic concerns.

The EU is not a state. It is a supra-national institution that has acquired some of the functions of a state. Similarly, there is no global government. Yet, global institutions have acquired some of the functions formerly the exclusive domain of states. As global institutions—particularly economic and financial institutions-- gain more power in the future, it is essential that we demand the development of mechanisms to keep these institutions accountable to their constituency—the global community. We also need to make sure that mechanisms are put in place to assure that a free trade economy is not built at the expense of the environment. Not surprisingly, there is considerable resistance to these ideas among international institutions which fear being stopped in their tracks.

Dealing with the Democratic Deficit and Issues of Sovereignty

It should also be noted that, even though the EU has gone farther than any other regional institution to introduce region wide laws, not only for the promotion of free trade, but also for the protection of the environment, there are strong critics of the EU system. The critics point to the EU's democratic deficit. What they argue is that because so much decision making power lies in the hands of the European Commission and Council—essentially groups of elite policy makers—decision making is not sufficiently democratic or transparent. The elected European Parliament has rather limited powers when compared with most national parliaments. It does not initiate laws; rather it votes on them. Over much of the last decade, there have been calls to strengthen the democratic institutions of the EU and this has led to some changes in decision making processes. Now, for example, the European Parliament has co-decision making authority on a number of issues. What that means is that its veto voice has become much more powerful. Critics are calling for even further changes. Thus, the kind of criticisms we see of globalization can be found even in the most advanced example of internationalization in the world.

Another important concern about internationalization and globalization is sovereignty. The fundamental, underlying principle of the current international system is of the sovereign nation state. Nations have the right to make decisions about what happens within their own borders. These sovereign rights are being challenged by globalization. Increasingly, nation states are being asked to give up degrees of sovereignty as they become involved in more international institutions. Increasingly international law is superseding domestic laws. Thus, for example, participants to the Montreal Protocol for the protection of the ozone layer may no longer produce ozone depletion substances.

But there are still limits on how far nations have been willing to give up their sovereignty. Tropical forest states have strongly resisted calls by the international community to limit deforestation activities arguing that forests are sovereign. The United States has resisted joining the Kyoto Protocol for fears that it would limit our sovereign right to economic growth and the “American way of life”.

There will inevitably be tensions between the growing mandate of international organizations and the traditionally powerful nation state. Efforts to promote environmental protection globally have been slowed or have failed on a number of

occasions because of a nation's concern about sovereignty. Indeed, under the current administration, the US has resisted full participation in many international agreements—environmental and others—because of its concerns about loss of sovereignty to the international community.

--Personally, I strongly applaud the formation of international institutions that promote multilateral decision making for environmental protection. I disagree strongly with the US administrations failure to pay up its UN dues and its hesitancy to participate in international environmental agreements, especially the Kyoto Protocol. I believe the US is sending the wrong message to the world with its actions. But the critics of the UN and other international institutions in the US raise some valid concerns about the efficiency and accountability of those organizations.

I think the anti-globalization protesters also have something to tell us. I would like to turn now to some of their concerns:

The Anti-Globalization Movement

The anti-globalization protests of recent years—the Battle for Seattle, the Demonstrations in Ottawa, Canada; the fatal protests in Genoa, Italy; and those expected in Washington, D.C.—remind me of the civil rights movements, the womens' movements, the environmental movements, the democracy movements, and the anti-apartheid movements of recent decades. It was not so long ago that movements arose in many parts of the world to fight for greater openness of national governments or for equal rights or for greater democracy. It was not so long ago that environmental movements were fighting battles with government and industry for the right to protection of human health from pollution or for a voice in economic decision making that could affect the environment. The anti-globalization protestors focus our attention on some of the same shortcomings that exist at the global level that nation states have been accused of in the past. What does globalization mean for those whose voice is not easily heard? What does globalization mean for those who can not talk—other species or future generations?

Although I deplore the violence that has accompanied many of the demonstrations—on the part both of demonstrators and the police, I see the protest movements focusing international attention on some of the same kinds of concerns regarding global institutions as they have raised in the past in relation to national institutions. They are arguing that global institutions like the IMF or the World Bank must be more transparent and must give a place to citizens groups. They are arguing that the developing world be given more voice in these powerful institutions. They are arguing that we can not simply promote free trade and assume that this will benefit the environment in the long run. The short term cost to the environment might be too high. If we are to continue down a path of economic and financial globalization, than it is imperative that we also develop global rules and mechanisms to enforce those rules—that will protect the environment and human health. I would also argue that we must develop systems that will lead to a fairer distribution of wealth in the world.

We are rapidly developing new international and global economic, financial, and political institutions. I do not believe that the nation state is going to disappear any time soon. But I do think that globalization will continue and that global institutions will become increasingly powerful. Thus, we do need to think about those institutions and how their actions affect societies, economies, politics, and the environment—for good or bad. This is something that the anti-globalization protestors are forcing us to do.

In the absence of a global government—and I for one do not like the idea of a global government—citizens' groups and the press can be even more important than they are in national systems. They provide one of the only checks on the actions of global corporations, international institutions, or powerful nation states.

There is good reason to believe that the role of international NGOs will increase with time. There has been a real growth in the number of NGOs operating around the world. NGOs can help monitor the activities of global corporations and thereby help protect the environment. They can pressure governments to do more to make an international agreement work out. They can share information, build networks, help to educate, and otherwise work together to protect the environment. To a very large extent, I think that this is one of the most positive developments in terms of enhancing the potential for environmental protection globally.

Having said this, I think we would be naïve to think that these same possibilities do not also exist for others who may have other goals than environmental protection. As an example, in the United States the environmental community grew explosively in the 1970s and were very effective in promoting their goals and objectives. After this time, however, other groups with other interests began to imitate the organizational strategies of the environmental groups. Thus, in the US we have seen the emergence of groups like the Global Climate Coalition—a large group of companies and industries opposed to a climate treaty. Similar developments are possible at the international level.

I raise this point simply to argue that we must be careful not to assume that NGOs always represent the interests of citizens or the environment. We must also be careful not to assume that NGOs are always democratic. Just as we need to think about what international institutions really do and how they operate we must pay attention to how the NGO community functions.

Globalization is with us. It is exciting. It is scary. It provides opportunities and threatens to create new problems. We can not stop globalization. But we can think about the shape it is taking and whether we want to change how global institutions and decision making processes to develop. That is the task for all of you as the next generation of thinkers and decision makers.

Before concluding my talk, I would like to raise on other set of issues related to globalization and the environment. Up until this point, I have primarily talked about how global institutions, norms, and processes affect democratic accountability and the

environment. Yet, it is important to realize that the environment has the power to affect globalization as well.

Environmental degradation can have powerful regional and global impacts

- 1.) Our economic activities—activities that may be enhanced with globalization—are causing considerable environmental damage, some of which is irreparable. Our burning of fossil fuels at ever greater rates is contributing to global climate change. We do not even know what the full consequences of climate change may be, but we know that they may be severe. Sea levels could rise. Extreme weather conditions could become more common. Weather patterns could shift. Some species could perish. The economic disruption that could ensue from such large scale environmental degradation is great. Other examples could be given as well. The rapid destruction of the world's tropical rainforests and old growth forests, the over-fishing of the oceans, the rapidly diminishing sources of fresh water—while perhaps not happening as fast as predicted by the likes of Paul Ehrlich and other environmental critics of industrialization—are nevertheless occurring. Does this generation have the right to leave future generations a planet scarred by our greed? Do we have the right to condemn the inhabitants of some parts of the globe to yet greater environmental stresses than they already face because of our desire to live more comfortable lives—lives that are based on the consumption of fossil fuels?
- 2.) If we do not begin to pay more attention to how economic activities, life styles, and population growth affect the environment we will most certainly see more environmental migrants in the future. There are already an estimated 20 million stateless people. These numbers will certainly grow. There are an estimated 100 million migrants within China alone—people moving from the rural areas to the cities in search of jobs during periods when agricultural work is low. This too places great strains on the urban environment.
- 3.) Environmental degradation can result in e.g. large-scale desertification, loss of agricultural land, or loss of livelihoods (e.g. with the loss of a fishing industry). This can have major implications for global corporations, insurance companies, and aid agencies. It can cause great despair at the individual level too.
- 4.) Environmental degradation can be linked to the spread of disease. Disease has killed more people in the world than has war. The great plagues—like the Black death—wiped out one in four people. The flu killed more people during World War I than did bullets and bombs. There is growing concern that diseases that are now under control could come back again. Malaria is an example. While still a problem in much of the developing world, malaria has been largely eradicated in Europe, the US and parts of Asia. I live in

Maryland, one of the first regions of the US to be colonized. One of the biggest causes of death among early US settlers was malaria. Malaria was brought under control in subsequent decades, and is no longer a problem there, but could it be again in the future? There is some concern that global warming could result in environmental conditions more favorable to the malaria carrying mosquito. There is also concern about the spread of new diseases-- like the deadly West Nile virus that was first reported in NY a year or two ago and is now in Maryland as well.

- 5.) Environmental destruction can place great additional burdens on the international aid system and on insurance companies as more communities are damaged or destroyed by severe weather conditions—hurricanes, floods, drought, or soaring temperatures.
- 6.) Environmental degradation can negate the benefits of economic growth. China, for example, is recognizing that pollution control is not just a luxury for the rich. Pollution is causing China great economic loss in terms of damaged agricultural products, loss of worker time, and the health costs associated with pollution.
- 7.) Environmental degradation can exacerbate existing ethnic tensions and even result in war. In the period since the end of the Korean War—there have been many disputes among Russia, Japan, the two Koreas, and China. Many of these disputes revolve around fishing rights. There have been a surprisingly high number of deaths associated with these disputes as fishermen and coast guards shoot at boats believed to be trespassing. Disputes are likely to be even more serious in areas that are already severely degraded and there is not enough to go around. More and more one hears that a shortage of freshwater will be one of the biggest problems of the next century and one that could lead to tensions among people vying for a limited resource that is essential to life.

Conclusion

If we ignore the damage we are causing to the planet as an international community then we will certainly pay a price—whether that is in the form of new diseases, higher tax burdens to pay for communities hit by extreme weather conditions, or increased tensions among neighbors.

Yet, environmental problems that are of an international or global scale also give us the opportunity to learn to overcome our differences and find solutions to pressing problems that we can agree upon. The Kyoto Protocol negotiations were more than just a process of developing a set of guidelines and rules for nations to deal with greenhouse gas emissions. They have been an educational process that has helped nations to understand each other's needs and goals, to help develop common priorities and to find ways to work together to make a difference. That may also have been the biggest lesson of the recent

meeting in Bonn. Globalization of political decision making is more than just finding the “best solution” to a problem—as the US administration is arguing should be done. It is also a process of communication, cross-societal learning, and making compromises.

What does all of this tell us? That we must be aware of the world around us. We must consider what kind of new global institutions we are building and what kinds of new global norms we are promoting. We should not take developments for granted. Globalization will impact our environment in powerful ways and in turn, how we treat the environment, in the long term, will help shape what kind of world we live in.