
Susan J. Buck has written an accessible book on a daunting topic — the management and protection of common pool resources that extend beyond the control of any nation-state or even a regional consortium of nations. *The Global Commons: An Introduction* makes three very useful contributions, clear definitions of international and global common-pool resources, deep descriptions of four examples — Antarctica, the high seas and deep seabed, the atmosphere, and outer space — and some analytical tools for understanding how such resources might be managed and protected despite their physical expanses or distance or inhospitality for humans.

This is not the type of book you might have come to expect on this topic. Professor Buck has not penned a polemic, decrying the absence of international regimes for policing these resources and predicting their and our imminent and inevitable demise. She is persistently and calmly critical of the notion of absolute national sovereignty, and observes that global commons almost certainly could not be sustained under that notion, but those criticisms and observations are interwoven with well-researched and thoroughly documented accounts of the many ways in which national governments and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have developed institutional arrangements to try to allocate access, limit overuse, restrict and penalize pollution, and preserve peaceful uses of these vast resource domains. Buck’s accounts of the development of international resource management regimes for these global commons should make it difficult for subsequent authors to deny that in many important instances, national governments have agreed to limitations upon their sovereign authority and territorial or martial designs in order to achieve multi-lateral commitments to sustain these global commons.

The purpose and spirit of Buck’s book in these respects echo Elinor Ostrom’s *Governing the Commons*, and related work on smaller-scale common-pool resources, to which Professor Buck acknowledges a substantial debt. Ostrom blended analytical development and case-study description to cast doubt upon the view that rational self-interested individuals would necessarily destroy common-pool resources, and to show that individuals could instead forge institutional arrangements to foster credible and enforceable commitments of mutual self-restraint that left them and the resources they used better off over the long-term. Buck similarly points out that international arrangements requiring mutual self-restraint can be formulated and implemented, despite the absence of a global Austinian lawmaker or Hobbesian Leviathan to govern by command. Her work adds to the growing body of literature of nonhierarchical, polycentric forms of governance.

Here, I must add two very important points. First, Buck’s approach may be similar to Ostrom’s, but it is certainly not identical. The *Global Commons* incorporates legal and cultural theory that did not play a similar role in *Governing the Commons*, and engages a question Ostrom was not considering, namely, whether the time has arrived for a fundamental reconstitution of insti-
tutional arrangements at the international level to deal with the global commons and other issues.

Second, although Professor Buck describes the development of several multilateral arrangements to manage and protect global commons, she is by no means sanguine about them. She uses the analytical framework developed early in the book to point out flaws, weaknesses, and long-term vulnerabilities of the international arrangements currently governing each global commons, especially as technological advances ease humans’ ability to access and derive value from these previously unreachable or unfathomable domains.

There are a few flaws in *The Global Commons* itself. The concluding discussion is disappointingly thin, which Buck attributes to limitations of space, but those limitations might have eased if she had reconsidered devoting an entire chapter to atmospheric pollution, only to conclude that it did not really fit her framework. The importance of information, uncertainty, and risk in the crafting of resource management arrangements is described well in the opening chapter, but used less effectively in the chapters on the four examples and in the conclusion. Yet, shortcomings such as these do not override the conclusion that *The Global Commons: An Introduction* is a welcome addition to the literature on the commons, and will enhance the reading list in any graduate or upper-level undergraduate course on the topic.

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