

## Hakan Seckinelgin, *The Environment and International Politics: International Fisheries, Heidegger and Social Method*

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In this book Hakan Seckinelgin reminds international relations scholars that the foundation of our discipline—the concept of sovereignty—is an ontological framework that limits our perception of human-environment relations. He argues that the idea of the sovereign nation-state is based in the anthropocentric enlightenment philosophies of Descartes and Kant and is therefore incompatible with the complexity of ecological systems. This disconnect is shown to be both geographical, in terms of partitioning large-scale systems along national boundaries, and philosophical in the abstraction of ‘nature’ from ‘man’. Heidegger’s works, particularly *Being and Time*, are presented as an alternative ethical grounding for studies of international environmental problems. Seckinelgin posits that the relationships contained in Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*—the human being existing within the world, rather than separate from it—is a philosophical means of reuniting humankind with the natural world. He further suggests that this reinstatement creates intellectual space for an ecological ethos in which non-human life is equally entitled to consideration in international politics.

Before elaborating on this philosophical discussion, Seckinelgin presents an interesting and important case study of the evolution of international fisheries management in the western Pacific Ocean. He uses this case to show that agreements based solely on national interests are not efficient in an ecological sense. For one thing, national boundaries are social constructs that seldom reflect ecological systems, such as the dissection of tuna migration paths by national exclusive economic zones after the adoption of the UN Law of the Sea. More importantly, coordinated management of the tuna stocks within the western Pacific only occurs through international cooperation. It is argued that this system will never really protect the ecosystem as a whole because management is based more on the interests of countries than concern for the species. This results in problems ranging from the adoption of inappropriate scientific standards, such as non-precautionary, single-stock indicators like maximum sustainable yield, through allowances for excess fishing vessels

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(overcapacity), as short-sited decision-makers give economic development priority over protection of the ecosystem.

Many authors in international relations have noted that such problems arise due to the norm of sovereignty and the primacy of national interests. However, Seckinelgin takes the argument a step further by asserting that the roots of sovereignty and international environmental management lie in the anthropocentrism of the modern era. He then goes on to dissect the writings of Descartes and Kant to trace the establishment of 'man' as separate from and therefore superior to nature. Thus, the problem of sovereignty is not simply in the conflicts of interest that it creates, but in the underlying illusion of human subjugation of non-human life. This argument is underpinned by a particularly interesting discussion of the ways in which politics delineates life, or at least what types of life should be considered when making political decisions.

Seckinelgin then shows how Heidegger's concept of Dasein, or the human-being-in-the-world, contrasts with the anthropocentrism of Cartesian philosophy. Simplifying the language from Seckinelgin's interpretation, there are three main points in this section. First, instead of relying on immutable 'laws', either natural or divine, human beings choose the 'world' in which they live. That is, they select the view of the world from which they make decisions, and their decisions then impact the world, though not necessarily as they expected. This makes the system inherently dynamic. Second, in this framework, humans exist because of their interaction with the rest of the world. Therefore, humans are neither better nor worse than non-human life, simply other. Third, the meaning of life is derived from the possibility of death, and while many humans choose to ignore this possibility by focusing on the mundane, some derive a sense of responsibility for all life from recognizing their own mortality.

It is this sense of responsibility for all life, not just human life, which Seckinelgin sees as a transformative influence on the relationship between the international and the ecological. It is the foundation for his ecological ethos in which non-human life is given a voice in the political sphere because of human concern. Briefly bringing the discussion back to his case, in his conclusion Seckinelgin suggests that the various species of tuna need to be included in international negotiations not simply as resources to be exploited by nation-states, but as ecological beings that also have a right to life. He then brings these ideas back to the critique of international relations as a discipline, suggesting that the addition of ethics to this disciplinary framework is insufficient, and a completely new perspective is necessary.

Within the book, the philosophical discussion (Chapters 3–5) is the strongest section. In the case study, Seckinelgin's arguments regarding the ecological—as opposed to management or institutional—failures of this regime are persuasive. In addition, the linkages he draws between this case, the broader context of the UN Law of the Sea, and the underlying norm of sovereignty are compelling. However, the case itself is rather outdated. It is particularly disappointing that the author did not include the creation and implementation of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission in his analysis, since this is a major recent development in international fisheries management in the area. Also, his reading of the literature misconstrues the 'success' of fisheries management in the western Pacific. Most authors recognize that this regime is successful *compared to other regional fisheries organizations*, but that there are still considerable management failures in the western Pacific, especially when ecosystem values are taken into consideration. Lastly, the organization of the early chapters is disjointed, and the exposition would be significantly improved with the addition of maps and figures to illustrate the textual points for the reader.

While many of the ideas conveyed in this book are interesting and thought provoking, Seckinelgin does not show how the transition to an ecological ethos might come about or what an international system based on this ethos might look like. He argues that the 'ecological call' can only be answered by individual respect for and questioning about non-human life, rather than legal/rationalist control, but he also indicates that such respect can only be realized through individual reflection and realization. If this is indeed the case, one is left wondering whether the Earth will survive long enough for human-kind to evolve into an ecologically ethical society, or if such evolution can take place at all. In addition to cognitive limits on human understanding of large scale human-natural systems, coordination problems would still exist in a world full of ecologically ethical individuals. It is easy to assume that these problems would be less constricting when national interests are no longer the primary concern, but without actually delving into the macro-level effects of this micro-level change in individual ethics, one cannot be certain what type of regime would emerge.

As a starting point for discussions of such a world, this book will provide considerable food for thought to most readers, though Seckinelgin's prose will be more accessible to scholars who are quite familiar with political philosophy. Chapter 5, which expounds on the ecological implications of Heidegger's work and is the heart of the argument, will be particularly difficult for readers who are not used to philosophical treatises. That said, this book might be appropriate for an advanced graduate course in environmental ethics or philosophy. The author does a good job of summing up his arguments throughout the book, so certain sections could be assigned in less advanced courses as well. Those considering this book should be aware that it is an application of political philosophy with implications for international relations, rather than an international relations text.