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Review of The State and the Global Ecological Crisis

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Review: The State and the Global Ecological Crisis
By John Barry and Robyn Eckersley

Reviewed by Victoria Carchidi
Washington, DC, USA

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Barry, John and Robyn Eckersley. *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005. 307 pp. ISBN: 0-262-52435-X. US$27.00 (softbound).

If someone were to conduct an "impact assessment of international environmental diplomacy," John Vogler miserably acknowledges, the results would be "shameful" for such supposedly environmentally motivated interactions' "contribution to global warming" through excessive air travel and "the mountains of paper consumed" (p. 237). This collection of essays does not shy away from unpalatable facts about the way states acting alone and in concert cause ecological damage.

Yet these twelve thought provoking essays move beyond the misery of documenting environmental failures. The collection explicitly looks "to discover to what extent it might be possible to " 'reinstate the state' as a facilitator of progressive environmental change rather than environmental destruction" (p. x).

Part I, "The State and Domestic Environmental Governance," succeeds in this goal. It includes Peter Christoff's article documenting Australia's history—and pointing out that not only environmental degradation, but efforts at conservation, began almost immediately upon European settlement of that continent. James Meadowcraft, and Christian Hunold with John Dryzek, set out frameworks for looking at the ecological range of state policies.

Hunold and Dryzek summarize their 2003 book (John S. Dryzek, David Downes, Christian Hunold, and David Schlosberg, with Hans-Kristian Hernes. *Green States and Social Movements*, Oxford, OUP, 2003) and present unexpected conclusions to the effects of governments' passive or active inclusion or exclusion of green activism. Norway's active inclusion of civic concerns has led to a green economy that silences radical options; the US's passive inclusion effectively ignores the environmental movement; the UK's active exclusion leads to easily placated greens; and, oddly, the passively exclusive government of Germany has led to an empowered, oppositional environmental movement that influences state policy and presses for radical change.

David Schlosberg's very elegant presentation of the case for extending environmental justice to nature and ecological justice adds another approach to Part 1.

Part II, "The State and Transnational Environmental Governance," succeeds less well in presenting varied perspectives of optimism and potential. John Vogler, quoted above, acknowledges that global environmental governance often concerns "the pursuit of status at the international level" (p. 237). Yet he rather desperately claims that "does not necessarily mean that there can be no substantive outcome" (p. 238). His language sometimes bogs down in his effort to find a non-negative lining to international initiatives. Tim Hayward would like to see constitutionally mandated rights to an adequate environment implemented, but does not see that as likely in the European Union, and doubts that any broader international environmental right could be enacted or lived up to. Ken Conca, too, tries to balance his realistic pessimism with a brighter edge. While he sees an international approach as essential, he also finds globalization limits the already restricted positive effects of states' ecological initiatives. His optimism emerges in hopes evoked by "a wide range of emergent institutional forms of global environmental governance" sitting between familiar—and environmentally hostile—"conceptual poles"(p/ 202-3).

Only more theoretical discussions really generate a positive tone. Robyn Eckersley, in "Greening the Nation-State," argues that "critical political ecology" can move away from a neo/ecorealist descriptions of states as "simply private controllers/exploiters" of their territories, and instead use the insight that units—whether people or states "can no longer rule or exercise autonomy effectively without some accommodation of interdependence and a broader set of transboundary/common concerns and responsibilities" (p. 167). In that reading, states become "custodians/caretakers of their own territories (not to mention the global commons)" (p. 168). Next, the states engage inclusively, rather than exclusively, for common good.

Steven Slaughter's "Alternative Foundation," as its title states, takes a different tack. Slaughter sees liberalism as "central to the developing ecological crisis" (p. 224). Instead, he looks to "neo-Roman republicanism," and reconstitutes ecological damage as "an issue of domination and power" to which states would be empowered to respond aggressively by a global structure that "would license rules of intervention in the affairs of a state" damaging the common good (p. 222). Slaughter's and Eckersley's approaches raise useful questions to consider, albeit cautiously in light of the historical record of global interventions.

The issues presented here are important areas of concern for anyone, and

the writing is unusually clear and lucid. The introduction suggests the book's audience is "scholars, students, and activists interested in national and global environmental politics" (p. x). But given the global climate change and its imperative restructuring of society, everyone should read these essays, consider what legitimacy their states have, and how pressing ecological questions urge us to reshape those institutions.

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