



# **Stateless Environmentalism: The Criticism of State by Eco-Anarchist Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

The State and its governmental institutions have been dignified in the environmentalist mainstream as palliative forces to face and solve the excesses and failures of capitalism and neoliberalism towards a proper environmental management. But this environmental state falls into evident contradictions regards to its formal commitment with environmentalist purposes. In addition, governmental institutions contribute to expand a nihilist attitude in the environmentalist actions of the citizenship. Within the environmentalist strands of anarchism, the matter of State has focused a relevant attention and position. An early green criticism may be found in the nineteenth century anarchists, in which State has no room as a violent and centralized force, and corrupting the goodness of the material, reproductive and spiritual connection of humans with Nature. Most recent eco-anarchist approaches, such as social ecologists, bioregionalists and anarcho-primitivists have analysed how determinant is State as a responsible agent in the global environmental crisis and proposed alternatives to this coercive power. This paper is aiming a) to examine some of the main contributions of the “green” criticism to State from eco-anarchists; and b) to build a consistent and wide critique of the State, helping to promote a non-statist balanced and fair relationship between societies and Nature.

## **Keywords**

Eco-anarchism; environmental state; environmentalism; bioregionalism; social ecology; anarcho-primitivism

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## **Introduction: The Environmental State, a Suspicious Legitimation?**

The State and governmental institutions have reached a determinant role in the environmental arena. Specific literature and scholars refer to this as a new stage or process of mutation of the former disrespectful and harming statist attitudes towards Nature, bonded to the origin of modern nation-states. This rise of environmental concerns within the national centralized governance is thus named with a variety of expressions such as ‘green state’ (Saward 1998; Dryzek et al. 2003; Eckersley 2004; Wilson 2006; Melo-Escrihuela 2008; Huh et al. 2018), ‘ecostate’ (Duit 2011; Craig 2020), ‘eco-social state’ (Koch and Fritz 2014; Jakobsson et al. 2018) or using a broader and all-encompassing approach as “environmental state” (Meadowcroft 2014; Duit et al. 2016; Gough 2016; Mol 2016; Hatzisavvidou 2019; Hausknost 2020; Machin 2020).

To a certain extent, responses to environmental claims within the public institutions are in proportion to their historical legitimacy, understanding the State as “the most powerful human mechanism for collective action than can compel obedience and redistribute resources” (Duit et al. 2016, 3). Since the emergence of post-war Welfare States mostly in the developed countries, public institutions have assumed the prerogative to intercede in the enhancement of standard for the citizenry, reinforcing the interventionist role of public over particular, corporate, communal and private interests. Thereby, the transition to an environmental state would be a step forward in the consolidation of the Welfare State inasmuch as the challenges that must be elucidated intimately affect to social and collective dimensions of quality of life. In fact, this transformation of the statist paradigm is actually a continuity of the same administrative procedures and organizational model but disguised as *green*.

Environmental issues demand regulatory methods, such as a normative framework, sanctions and taxes in order to guarantee basic dimensions of welfare which rely on environmental parameters; a sort of measures that coercive and authoritarian polities might implement with quite efficacy. Both developed and developing nation-states have increasingly placed in their administrative bodies a relevant position to the management of environmental problems, whether it has or not an equivalent influence to other remits, such as economy, public security and finances. Furthermore, the environmental agency has been formed in order to overcome the traditional centralization and thus to face cross-border issues. That is, the ecological crisis has forced to transform the conventional welfare State configuration by unfolding a bureaucracy structure which encompasses a variety of entities in a wide range of scales. In the context of Europe, the EU plays the role of a mega-state or trans-national corpus, commanding main lines of action in strategic fields, distributing funds and incentives for green practices, and elaborating environmental policies with a cascade effect all over member countries and regions. But, in addition, many municipalities and regions, as a result of state decentralization, have been working based on networks in order to accomplish a proper management of water resources, natural protected areas, exchange of urban sustainability experiences or climate change collaborative actions.

A statist spirit has also penetrated the environmental praxis by a deliberately spreading of values and knowledge. The rise of environmental concern within citizenship is, in a great extent, an achievement of educational campaigns promoted by public institutions and resources, the assumed responsibility in determining an official and lawful environmentalist discourse. Likewise, quite a few public funds and budget items have been targeted to stimulate research in scientific advances, with a particular focus on green technological solutions, driving thus the production of an amount of knowledge in favour to strategic areas and aims of public governments. This role of public institutions in the sprawl of environmentalist values, considering its moralistic power over society, is therefore “part of a continuing effort to legitimate state environmental intervention” (Duit et al. 2016, 8).

However, the effectiveness and success of environmental state is equally questioned (Mol 2016) since it is not working as an isolated political entity, but another actor –determinant one– in the complex nexus of globalized market, neoliberal international organisms, cross-national corporations, institutional

commitments, NGOs, environmentalist movements, and citizenship. Therefore, the capacity of administrating and applying environmental policies has been constrained and, at the very best, tends to have a palliative and corrective character with very little room for manoeuvre. In addition, nation-states have lost power in their capacity to unilaterally regulate important environmental dues and duties, given for instance the weakness shown under the influence of market institutions. Furthermore, they usually contribute to sponsor and promote private and national projects that inflict severe and non-reversible damages on environment, such as extractivism, hydropower dams, land grabbing and urban sprawl (Gerber 2011; Borrás Jr. et al. 2012; Grajales 2013; Wolford et al. 2013; Constantino 2016; Martínez-Alier and Walter 2016). This shows that environmental states do the management of environmental challenges through a double standard and commonly have a counterproductive effect. According to the above scenario, it would be difficult to support the argument that the State is an authorized power in order to face efficiently environmental issues.

Even bearing in mind these obstacles, the legitimized and gained environmental authority of states is far to be rejected. My thesis is indeed based on a theoretical background rather than empirical. There is an extended cliché which echoes in society, political and a significant part of the academic discourse: the belief that liberal state is a synonym or an equivalent to democracy. And given the urgency of solutions for environmental issues, it is assumed that “building on the state government structures that already exist seems to be a more fruitful path to take than any attempt to move beyond or around states in the quest for environmental sustainability” (Eckersley 2004, 91). In sum, the institution of environmental state helped to reinforce the legitimacy of liberal state (Eckersley 2004, 140).

Moreover, there is enough evidence and quite a few pros and cons either to idealize or condemn the role of State along the last six decades of environmental governance. According to Mol the environmental state was exposed to ups and downs in all this period, gaining a broad international recognition during the nineties (Mol 2016), but undergone a recent decline along with a “hybridisation” (Conca 2005) and “diversification” (Spaargaren and Mol 2008) of environmental authorities. As it was mentioned above, national governments and other modalities of public power have been the ‘judge and jury’ of the environmental crisis. So, this process of legitimation transcends such evidences, and is sustained by a kind of imaginary which is widely accepted in diverse forums, such as the academic one. According to the ecological critique of the administrative state, this is not “the type of entity that is capable of systematically prioritizing the achievement of sustainability” (Eckersley 2004, 140). The green critical theory maintains that “states are part of the problem rather than the solution to ecological degradation” (Eckersley 2004, 90). Yet, it is easy to find in this left-side environmentalist movements – such as degrowth, eco-marxism and environmental post-structuralism– a notorious advocacy of environmental state in spite of their failures, limitations and inefficacy, recognizing it as the lesser of two evils solution or due to its commonly correspondence with democratic values (Demaria et al. 2013; Ariès 2015; Asara et al. 2015; Kallis 2015). Moreover, this legitimation is not uniquely bonded to the process of mutation into an environmental state, but to the origin and consolidation of modern-state.

Considering this controversy, an eco-anarchist approach may help to question the legitimized power of environmental state and to identify it as a determinant driving force of the ecological crisis. Indeed, anarchist thought agglutinates two conditions for this examination: 1) a radical opposition to the State as an idealistic political organization, based on ontological, scientific and moral precepts; and 2) a long tradition of critical green thought since the early anarchist intellectuals to the contemporary libertarians. Within it, diverse perspectives may be distinguished, from the acknowledged early anarchist geographers as avant-garde environmentalist thinkers, to the appearance of diverse strands in responding the emergence of environmentalist sensibilities emerged in the mid of twentieth century: social ecology, liberation ecology, anarcho-primitivism, bioregionalism and deep ecology.

Being cautious, this work does not pretend to canonize the anarchist vision, as the most authorized voice in order to dismantle the environmental state, for instance, in the line of how R. Goodin excessively asserts that “greens are basically libertarians-cum-anarchists” (Goodin 1992, 152). The “green” labels an incredible spectrum of ideologies, from staunch supporters to bitter enemies, of the role of the State in the environmental agenda. Thereby, greens may encompass both a statist environmentalism, supported by left-side parties, in proportion to social aims and equity policies, but also approaches from ultra-neoliberal sectors, which are partisans of non-interventionist tools on the market, in the framework of green capitalism, but quite far from or even antagonistic to anarchist positions. Yet, I consider green anarchism and the libertarian thought in general offer a radical and utopian position that may help to decolonize a kind of state environmentalism, based on moral precepts such as anti-authoritarianism, social and environmental justice, but also on solid scientific background. Regarding to this green anarchism or anarchist ecology, it has produced a wide variety of insights, perspectives and theoretical background which share common points, but they do not form a monolithic and homogenous discourse. Rather, the different strands concur on similarities but also display divergences in basic aspects such as the idea of progress, the role of technological advances, the spatial organization of societies and ontological view. In addition, considering the historical gap, the kind of arguments raised by early anarchists rarely went straight on the topic of environmental state. As we explained above, the irruption of this archetypical governance is a contemporary process. Nevertheless, they outlined the main ontological and theoretical skeleton of anarchist thought and produced interesting reflections by theorizing on the State in comparison to Nature and pre-statist societies, which are undoubtedly impregnated of an environmental sensibility. At bottom, they laid the foundations of the modern environmentalist critique.

Therefore, this work proposes to show that green anarchist thought has potential tools for analysing the role played by the State in environmental governance, problematizing intrinsic and structural aspects associated with the State as an anti-governance according to libertarian tradition. But also, anarchist thought might be ideal in order to decolonize the environmentalist discourse and praxis from statist attitudes and its extended legitimation. For that, three points will be analysed in order to question the power, authority and efficacy of State in environmental issues: a) the State as an unnatural and external institution to the Nature-society relationships; b) its configuration as entropic and unsustainable spatial model of governance; and c) the production of statist discourse of the idea of Nature and of its management. In addition, some controversies and divergences will be examined within the eco-anarchist perspectives, concluding that there is not an undeniable agreement in their basic insights on State and in their idealization of new alternatives of environmental governance.

### **The Unnatural *S(s)tate***

The anarchist imaginary has been traditionally tagged with the stereotypical idea of chaos and licentiousness (Ince and Barrera 2016), whereas State has been associated with order and organization. This stigma has been strengthened comparing anarchism with primitivism, tribal societies, violent rebels and convulsed times, analogies that many anarchist partisans have intentionally pretended to evoke. On the other hand, some hegemonic political theories of Western thought have related these features to the most ingenuous, mystic, vulnerable, archaic and lower developed stages of history. Instead, states, in spite of their vicissitudes, are the symbol of modernity, civilized and mature societies. Thus, the legitimation of State lies especially on this commonplace and, according to this interpretation, a sustainable society -a sign of green prosperity- must be reached through this governmental filter.

Obviously, this cliché has been contested since very early on by the anarchist thinkers, who, appealing to scientific and moral precepts, have argued over the abolition of State and the suitability of non-statist orders. Anarchist ontology sees the State as an unnatural and alien polity when it is compared to the way in which human societies have organized themselves throughout their historical evolution. In

fact, an essential pillar of anarchist utopia is the conception of a social organization in which there is no place for institutions and organizations that gather power and use it to exploit or oppress society. This is the most recognized issue of anarchism: their partisans frontally reject any external institution to society that imposes political authority, hierarchy and domination (Hall 2001). As Black asserts, “morality is to the mind what the state is to society: an alien and alienating limitation on liberty” (Black 2004, 6).

The term ‘unnatural’ contains, at first, a moral connotation for anarchists: State would be for anarchism the least humanized way of organizing a society as it deprives legitimized rights and aspirations of every individual: freedom, justice, equity within diversity, etc. For the founder of social ecology, Murray Bookchin (1921-2006), the State is “unnatural and runs counter to the thrust of evolution” (Davidson 2009, 56) and Ted Trainer, anarchist-oriented thinker who champions the “simpler way” in the conception of more sustainable societies, advocates that “humans will not reach the social maturity until they learn to govern themselves” (Trainer 2017, 183). These contemporary ideas about the ‘unnatural’ State nourish from the early anarchists. Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) categorically asserted that the State “denotes violence, oppression, exploitation and injustice” (Maximoff 1953, 224), being, therefore, “a negation of humanity” (Hall 2011, 376). William Godwin (1756-1836), decades before, stressed the strong antagonism between the State and society, which affects its different ‘nature’: the government or state authority reproduces perpetual stagnation while society manifests itself in a constant flow (Marshall 1992, 206). He idealized the capacity of societies of being more flexible than immobile states in order to face external changes.

Applying this argument to the performance of government, the coercive power of public institutions is driven to control, monitor and even punish any attempt at abnormal behaviour outside established parameters. Yet, societies would be more suitable to adapt to environmental changes than a heavier and more intricate setting of bureaucratic institutions and normative framework. Based on this binary ontology and capacity of flexibility, it enables to interpret the genesis of environmental states like an encounter of forces, as a dialectic conflict between society and State. Indeed, environmental states are somehow a metamorphosis with regard to the industrial state, assuming a greater responsibility and transforming institutions, laws and procedures with a green philosophy. However, many of the advances and enhancements in terms of environmental health, protection and rights are actually the reply to societal demands, obtained with great effort and as a result of decades of tragedies, costs and sacrifices. Situations in which society responded through adaptation or self-organized measures before public institutions could or wanted to confront them. In this regard, and following the antagonistic view State/society, the latter has forced to change the State performance through claims and vindications. The correspondence, according to Peter Marshall, is not balanced, as “even its benign face of welfare creates dependence and undermines local initiative, mutual aid and self-help” (Marshall 2001).

Thus, the capacity of societies in order to implement strategies of voluntary self-sufficiency and collective-based are dramatically cut when State intervenes, seen through the anarchist lens. Piotr Kropotkin (1842-1921) asserted that the State, though it is a governmental corpus and normative framework to enforce order in social interrelationships, is also a source of individualism, by which “in proportion as the obligations towards the State grew in numbers the citizens were evidently relieved from their obligations to each other” (Kropotkin 1902). Overall, individualist behaviours, in regards to economic decisions, entail less thought on the moral limits of our actions and practices as ecological citizens (Melo-Escrihuela 2008). Notwithstanding, a voluntary transition to self-sufficiency requires a deep and broader sense of citizenship, and even of kinship, as the French geographer Élisée Reclus (1830-1905) advocated (Reclus 1896), integrating both human individuals as well as non-human life.

Based on Trainer’s insights (Trainer 2017), the minimization of self-government and voluntariness by imposed authority and representative democracies, might be a reason to delegitimize state in a double scenario: a) the State still concentrates power and is the authorized administrator of

environmental practices; b) the State has lost power in favour to the financial powers and market agents. In the first scenario, the absence of self-assumed responsibility and action by the citizenship in the context of representative democracies, might lead to a greater centralization of power and the proliferation of eco-dictatorships, presuming a probable future of acute resource scarcity and negatively affecting the distribution of goods (Trainer 2017). In the second one, State would dramatically fall in a nihilist terrain of neoliberalist attitude, fostering wild competitiveness, individualistic and private interest and degrading environmental facilities gained in the time of environmental states, i.e., a severe application of green capitalism. Following an organizational realist approach, eco-anarchist partisans advocate that “states are organizations that control (or attempt to control) territories and people” (Skocpol 1989; Eckersley 2004). There are internal necessities performed by the State, such as resource extraction, administration and coercive control from which society is excluded or reduced to mere passive individuals. This reinforces the thesis that there are statist interests beside the social ones, which are intentionally hermetic and hidden to the population (Trainer 2017). Namely the State would have exclusive and *private* targets in the environmental performance.

Moreover, the argument of ‘unnatural’ State has also received scientific support among the early anarchist geographers. Basic foundations on ideal society were provided by the geographers E. Reclus and P. Kropotkin, along with Lev Metchnikoff (1838-1888). Indeed, this scientific anarchism gave historical depth and biological proofs to non-statist orders (Mac Laughlin 2017). Headed by Kropotkin, they worked in the conformation of an alternative theory to the most conservative in opposition to the Darwinian evolutionism, being condensed in his well-known work “The Mutual Aid” (Kropotkin 1902). Its essential argument is that in the success of the evolution, whether human or not, cooperation and mutualism were more determinant than competition; attitudes that Kropotkin mainly ascribed to the intraspecific interaction. The cooperation for survival would be the unique solid basis for having an ethical code towards social progress (Mac Laughlin 2017). Such insight was not a brand-new discovery. Actually, the theory of mutual aid continued an intellectual tradition of mutualism approach in Russia, but anarchist oriented (Goodwin 2010) and probably introduced in scientific terms by the own Metchnikoff (Ferretti and Pelletier 2019), with obvious ideological reminiscences in anarchist thinkers such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1808-1865) or Robert Owen (1771-1858) (Kropotkin 1912). This would show the State as an ineffective and destructive institution, as it does not cooperate but dominates exerting its power in unfavourable exchange for society. Such argument adds solidity to the initial idea that the State is an unnatural form, whereas society precedes the State and, even according to Kropotkin himself, society is a reality prior to the emergence of the human being: “Man did not create society, society existed before Man” (Kropotkin 1902).

The mutual aid thesis reinforces the role of early, primitive and indigenous societies as models for non-hierarchical and cooperative societies, to which Kropotkin devoted great attention (Kropotkin 1902; 1969) and Reclus considered to have a deeper and more embedded connection with Nature than modern societies (Reclus 1866). Stateless societies, however, encompass different levels of technical advances and complexities, according to the social ecologist Murray Bookchin, identifying a libertarian tradition along the history (Bookchin 1982). These communities lacked an organizational model based on the hierarchy or vertical domain, but they configured political systems, where authority or the exercise of power was not given by something external. Needless to say, those anarchies were not arbitrary or subject to chaos, but had a perfectly structured system, where in addition, the interaction with the environment, was intimate, emotional and deeply respectful. From this ontological view, ethical implications are derived, arguing or justifying the defence of coevolution and mutual support as essential principles of every society, whether human or not. In fact, the political commitment of the anarchist Kropotkin was preceded by his observations of the natural world (Todes 1989; Goodwin 2010; Mac Laughlin 2017).

## An Entropic Spatial Organisation

The ‘unnatural’ also designates a quality that entails thinking the State as the least suitable form of social organization to fit in the functioning and integrity of Nature and the human being within it. Not surprisingly, early anarchists were “ecologically oriented” (Morris 1996), advocating tenets that have had continuity in the agenda and praxis of contemporary radical environmentalism, such as decentralization, heterarchical social organization or mutual interdependence. These practices show a clear dichotomy and antagonism in regard to the State’s structure and do not lie exclusively in the exercise of political dialectics. By exploring the roots of the anarchist movement in 19th century, it is proven that there is a strong scientific foundation, in which, precisely, the functioning of Nature and the understanding of its interactions motivate the anarchist utopia and therefore the ideal of a society without State.

During this time and thanks to the previous works of geographers such as Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), the study and understanding of Nature moves away from the Cartesian mechanical philosophy to an organicist and harmonic vision of life and environment. This approach affirmed that unlike the State there is no centralizing force within the “living” component of ecological systems, “only interaction” (Purchase 1994). Along with this, the organizing principle does not come from external sources but rather it is a self-regulatory behaviour, as Kropotkin argued, where “everything is adapted, ordered, and organized for everything else” (Purchase 1994, 29). It is not (only) a romantic claim yearning the wildlife or a contemplative attitude towards the apparent order of Nature. From a teleological point of view, this equilibrium is not permanent or harmonically achieved without constrictions or variability. Rather, it is understood in a broader reality at the expense of homeostasis or local imbalances. In addition, the external source that nourishes natural ecosystems, i.e., solar radiation, is dissipated to be used at different organizational levels. Using this metabolic model as a reference, the State would be, however, an inefficient machine. It concentrates power to maintain order but at the expense of increasing the entropy in its environment, that is, to those administrative units which are submitted or receive its authority.

In addition, P. Kropotkin largely discussed the spatial strategy of capitalism and its dramatic effects on environment and social life. In doing so, he was revealing the role of States, that he considered “always interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter” (Kropotkin 1912, 84). Thereby, statist targets are oriented to a severe centralization and creating disparities in the standard of living among the population, but also extend social and environmental impacts in the territory. In his work, “Fields, factories and workshops”, he advocated for the decentralization of production units, such as small-scale factories, bonded to the cultivation of fields, which he considered the way to achieve an ecological balance, an enhancement of life conditions of workers and the creation of a counterbalance power to the central authority of State (Mac Laughlin 2017). Indeed, for Lewis Mumford, Kropotkin was a pioneer in a regional conception of sustainable development and organic economic, stressing the mutual interdependence between cities and villages (Mumford 1961; Mac Laughlin 2017). He complained how “in industry, as well as in politics, centralisation has so many admirers!” (Kropotkin 1901, 179). In a certain way, Kropotkin was already warning about State as a colonizing force of the welfare imaginary and social progress that decades later would be filter by an environmentalist sensibility.

Given the above, for eco-anarchists, the State is far to be a suitable structure of power to which delegate the management of Nature and environmental problems, given its size and design regarding the eco-social space under its domain. Thus, for bioregionalists, the State is a dysfunctional spatial configuration and the “typically large scale of the nation-state as a territorial unit, when combined with the centralized nature of the state as a decision-making body, ensures that it is insufficiently responsive to the idiosyncratic needs of specific ecosystems” (Davidson 2009, 50). The management of complex, non-linear and irreversible changes of environmental problems do not fit well in the labyrinthine

bureaucratic framework (Dryzek 1992) and innate features (hierarchy, accumulation of power and material resources, administrative boundaries) of environmental states. It may also be stressed the problems associated with the delimitation of administrative units. Bioregionalists insist in the conflict between political boundaries and ecological-natural divisions. Indeed, Snyder warns in regards to these frontiers, that “the lines are quite often arbitrary and serve only to confuse people’s sense of natural associations and relationships” (Snyder 1980, 24-25). That would be a proof of how, in spite of the creation of supra-national bodies in order to collaborate for the management of cross-national ecosystems, conflicts between nation-states and administrations on which is the responsible or the ruler over these areas are far to be resolved.

Alternatives to the entropic “megamachine” of State (Mumford 1970) are driven to create either communities or cultures which would be “integrated with nature at the level of the particular ecosystem” (Gorsline and House 1990). Based in these precepts, the utopianism of Charles Fourier was for many contemporary anarchists, such as L. Mumford and Murray Bookchin, the first social ecologist ever, inasmuch as he connected the social order with the laws of Nature (Mumford 1970; Bookchin 1982). If these laws are properly understood, will “conduct the human race to opulence, sensual pleasures and global unity” (Beecher and Bienvenu 1972: 1). In the words of Mumford, it would be to move from “megatechnics” or “power” to “biotechnics” or “plenitude”: “If we are to prevent megatechnics from further controlling and deforming every aspect of human culture, we shall be able to do so only with the aid of a radically different model derived directly, not from machines, but from living organisms and organic complexes (ecosystems)” (Mumford 1970, 395).

As it may be deduced, and considering the diversity of strands that eco-anarchism has enabled, the realization of this utopia differs among partisans of those strands. One of the differential factors is the intensity of the adaptive capacity of the community to the environmental boundaries and biodiversity. For instance, anarcho-primitivists (J. Zerzan, D. Jensen) mirrors the spirit of early anarchist such as Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and his quest of wilderness and they “deem ‘civilisation’ in all its various guises to be inherently destructive” (Smith 2007, 472). Consequently, they defend a returning to a more primitive lifestyle. This is supposed to be a kind of tribal organization, achieving a sustaining and pure connection with Nature. On the other hand, bioregionalists and social ecologists keep the duality nature/culture in the political sense, and imagine communities based in principles such as decentralization, self-sufficiency, self-ruling and communal land (Davidson 2009); all of them inspired by the internal performance of natural ecosystems. They will set the conditions for having non-hierarchical relations and avoid the inefficacy of accumulated power of statist institutions, its coercive methods and the delegating responsibilities and rights. Such social utopias would demand a transition from national-state to local governance, but self-ruling cannot be performed in isolation and autarkical way (Sale 2000), considering both the permeability of environmental boundaries and the serious limitation of resources in poorer contexts.

To this regard, some central points are subjected to controversy. For instance, the delimitation of administrative units based on environmental and natural boundaries are exposed to an enormous casuistry. This complicates the determination of a proper scale or basic unit to which span the management of communities. Social ecologists and Murray Bookchin in particular commit to libertarian municipalism, moulding communities to the ecosystems in which they are located (Bookchin 1974). Bioregionalists advocate the bioregion as “an important and unique method of demarcating political space” stressing the importance of “watershed boundaries (the distribution of rivers) as the primary method or regional demarcation” (Purchase 1997). The former has, technically, more problems than the latter, insofar as the political boundaries of municipalities may be a burden to achieve a proper adaptation and management of local ecosystems. On the other hand, the bioregion arises the problem of generating tough constraints to the freedom and internal diversity of population in terms of rude adaptation of



available natural goods and environmental thresholds; thereby, and considering a strict application of this natural edges, population would be condemned to a kind of environmental determinism. In this sense, Barry notes, “that would leave some resource-poor economies in a worse position than they need be in the absence of trade and redistribution” (Barry 1996, 233), as he considers inappropriate an autarkic government, to which some bioregionalists and deep-ecology thinkers are partisans (Price 2019). Both scenarios would justify the existence of trade, charity or barter in order to compensate natural imbalances between communities, and to get environmental justice between territories, but far from neoliberal and capitalist codes. In any case, this localist approach, whether forcing previous political demarcations or creating new ecologically-based ones, would potentially respond to the natural diversity and carrying-capacity of the environments, and be more flexible than the restricted form of how environmental policies have been applied by means of statist intervention. This approach would question the existence of same protocols and procedures in different cities, towns and regions, in order to obey higher-scale guidelines by states or cross-national organisms, which in the end lead to a standardization of the solutions: “countries are becoming increasingly similar in how and when they respond to environmental problems” (Duit et al. 2016, 10).

A hypothetical transition to localism demands to reply to the problem that environmental crisis is a global matter that inevitably require a respective global environmental governance, in order to have common agreements and strategies. The same old song that sounds in the situation that environmental states are experimenting and acting nowadays. Nothing new under the sun. Within the philosophy of bioregionalism and social ecology coordinating bodies are proposed and both are moving in the line of federalism. The French anarchist Proudhon was a firm partisan of federalism, and he considered as a system to emphasize the political autonomy and the social order by means of social contracts and contractual exchanges of goods and services (Mac Laughlin 2017). Probably stimulated by this foundational idea, bioregionalists propose a confederation of communities in the shape of communication and information networks, political deliberative and decision-making body (Sale 2000, 96). Murray Bookchin, distancing from the most autarkic ideal of bioregionalism, advocated “libertarian forms of confederalism”, being “a network of administrative councils”, due to “decentralism (and) self-sufficiency which (is not enough)” to “achieve a rational ecological society” (Bookchin, 1989, 6). Yet, they look alike statist institutions (Barry 1996; Davidson 2009), and critical scholars together with eco-anarchist are not very optimistic that bioregions and municipalism by themselves, namely people without authority, even within coordinated and federal structures, will ensure entirely democratic and real commitment with environmental issues, without a quota of coercive power (Goldsmith 1978; Miller 1984; Barry 1996; Davidson 2009). In sum, and considering these vicissitudes, an eco-anarchist would conclude that “a free and ecological society is best organized on the twin pillars of decentralization and federation” with “a direct and participatory form of democracy” (Marshall 2001).

### **A Statist Discourse Uprooted From Nature**

A third aspect of the public legitimation of environmental state resides, once again, in an ontological premise: the human being has created a *second nature*, outside our *first nature* (Marshall 1992, 606). This binary vision is actually an Aristotelian-Hegelian teleological tradition that have influenced from the early to the contemporary eco-anarchists, but such entities were not conceived as separated and isolated. For instance, E. Reclus and Murray Bookchin interpreted these two realms as one emerging from the other. That is, *second nature* is the product of human society, which subsequently and simultaneously emerges from the *first nature*. All their artefacts, technologies, landscapes, political institutions and ideas are the “consciousness” of the *first nature* (Reclus 1905-08; Bookchin 1986; Toro 2018), that is, our biological condition and source of material goods. The State would be within the *second nature* but, under anarchist precepts, it hinders and distorts our necessary approximation and vital link with Nature.

Bookchin appealed to a historical analysis of societies and how power and hierarchical relations have been built up to the present moment. He concluded that the State is “not only a constellation of bureaucratic and coercive institutions but also a state of mind, an instilled mentality for ordering reality” (Bookchin 1982, 94). In this regard, he understands the State as a psyche that has penetrated the way of understanding politics. Therefore, according to him, the management of nature has been colonized by a statist praxis. Since “environmentalism does not question the most basic premises of our society based on domination and hierarchy” (Marshall 1992, 611), our actions and practices toward Nature are reproducing hierarchical, coercive and authoritarian attitudes as the State ones; to which we may add the individualist and selfish behaviours. Even more, there are eco-friendly practices that are not officially recognized and counted by public institutions, out of control of their protocols or normative framework, for instance: domestic reutilization and recycling of products -non officially classified waste-, organic agriculture without the statist guarantee stamp and informal transmission of environmentalist values and education.

Indeed, the environmental concern of the State and governmental institutions determine, for the social ecologists, the conception of an official environmentalism, guided by an instrumental sensibility of Nature. Thus, the managed Nature would be a simple passive habitat composed of objects, where, at the very best, it must act for the conservation of healthy and pristine redoubts of wild nature and for the control of pollution (Marshall 1992, 611). This reification of environmental compounds is, for Bookchin, the most determinant cause of the ecological crisis. It is not due to the State itself, but any institution or system that coercively or violently fosters, through its authority, obedience, domination and exploitation of society, whether political, religious, social or even cultural (Bookchin 1982). Such behaviours have characterized the state intervention aligned with private corporations; involving them in the most severe damages of twentieth century (McNeil 2000).

Undoubtedly, eco-anarchist thinkers, combining contemporary environmentalism with early traditions, contemplate violence, injustice, coercion and abuse of power not lined up with a constructive and carefully attitude toward natural realm (*first nature*). Bookchin attempted to synthesize such argument in “Ecology of Freedom” (1982), the title of one of his works. This would mean that a free society can only be achieved through a more respectful and closer relationship to what Nature offers us. Not in vain, for Bookchin, the term libertarian has as its source of inspiration the own functioning of the ecosystem: “the image of unity in diversity, spontaneity, and complementary relations, free of all hierarchy and domination” (Bookchin 1982, 30). An idea shared with early anarchists such as Reclus and Kropotkin, for whom Nature would act as a moralizing force and as a dispenser of values and teachings for fairer and liberating social orders (Reclus 1881; Kropotkin 1893; Toro 2016). Thus, Nature has to be conceived beyond an instrumental way, i.e., as a simple source of resources and goods. Peaceful and moralizing attitudes are relevant for deep ecology partisans, betting for a directly experienced immersion with the natural world (Heckert 2010, 26). For A. Naess, “supporters of the deep ecology movement seem to move more in the direction of non-violent anarchism than toward communism” (Naess 1989, 156).

The official discourse of statist environmentalism is also supported by the structure and design of State. For bioregionalists, the spatial configuration of states feed the epistemic disconnection of society from nature (Davidson 2009, 50). As we argued above, the centralized and hierarchical power of environmental state directly or indirectly is monopolizing the usage and management of Nature. In doing so, it is liberating of responsibilities to the society and creating a perceptual and cognitive filter between the real Nature (*first nature*) and citizenship. People no longer have to be concerned with manipulating and caring environmental goods, because all of these practices are a matter of State. Public environmentalist propaganda is thus mainly diverted to divulgate a biased and partial knowledge and interrelationship with Nature. Governmental and regulatory institutions will offer solutions and measures

that citizenship could and ought to assume (recycling practices, austere habits, use of public transport) because they are regulated and performed according to a normative apparatus, subsidization and taxes. Also, wild spaces and natural parks are systematically organized to make a light and comfortable engagement of society into an iconic and domestic Nature, but keeping everything under the statist control.

The legitimation of environmental actions of State has an added turn, based in the construction of discourses and commonplaces. As Ward asserted: “Shorn of the metaphysics with which politicians and philosophers have enveloped it, the state can be defined as a political mechanism using force” which “is directed at the enemy without, but it is aimed at the subject society within” (Ward 1996, 24). Not rarely, Nature, the non-domesticated nature or first nature and its changes and forces we cannot control, are presented as this external enemy. In the majority of Environmental Summits, states and governments frequently invoke to a “struggle against climate change”. Certainly, this responds to a deliberative strategy of evading own responsibilities, and bringing together the most of the public involvement, and being condescending with the neoliberal powers and institutions.

### **Discussion: Divergences Within the Eco-Anarchist Utopias Around Politics and State**

Green strands of contemporary anarchism are far to reproduce a unique discourse in their construction of society-Nature relationship utopia, but also in their critiques of the State. It is not surprising that Bookchin revealed his clear divergence, at least in his early works, with the proposals of eco-Marxism, just because of the role that the State has to accomplish in an environmental facet. He argues that the Marxist conception of environment and its justification of statist governance are clearly capitalist in its understanding of the productive relationship with Nature. There is plenty of evidence during the contemporary environmental history that pollution and environmental degradation were something inherent to both capitalist and communist states, as long as the coexistence of these two blocks existed. On the other hand, historically, there were many samples of sustainable stateless communities, but it does not mean that contemporary ecological attitudes will be ensured throughout communities that may be based on bioregional or municipalist organizations.

It is true that social ecology, defended by Bookchin, is not exempt from certain controversies. For instance, he argued that human beings, through technological advances, ought to transform Nature as a way to expand opportunities and thus achieve higher levels of freedom and comfort for society: “an ecotechnology would be use the inexhaustible energy capacities of nature... to provide the ecocommunity with non-polluting materials or wastes that could be easily recycled” (Bookchin 1974, 83-84). Anarcho-primitivists and deep ecologists, in a lesser extent, are oppose to a firmly dependence from technology. Instead, for Bookchin, technology might and has to be emancipatory, but this has not been proven in such a way in green capitalist states or even along the history. Indeed, the analysis of the anarchist thinker L. Mumford on “megamachine” showed the strong ties between statist power and the usage of technology in order to control societies and Nature (Mumford 1967; Mumford 1970). Bookchin saw the State, according to his critical questioning of Marxism, in a transitional period, a period of austerity and sacrifice. For him, precisely the anarchist society should move from the terrain of necessity (Marxist view) to the terrain of freedom (Marshall 1992, 609). Through this interpretation, Bookchin is creating a kind of anarchist cornucopia that does not seem very real in a future scenario of scarcity and degrowth.

Another controversial position within social ecologists and Bookchin is the omitted responsibility with non-human species, an issue that predecessors such as E. Reclus understood as nuclear in the restoration of our links with Nature (Toro 2018). The French geographer conceived non-human and human life as a great family and even acknowledged its quota of importance in political action. As a corollary, Reclus inquired into historical samples to illustrate his thesis and showed how animals have a

political weight in some non-statist cultures (Reclus 1896). In the same line, anarcho-primitivists pretend to extend the moral consideration towards animals (Hall 2011), but without questioning a kind of supremacy of human being: “while condemning hierarchical domination and professing rights for all, the Left fails to take into account the weighty needs and interests of billions of oppressed animals” (Best 2009, 191). However, in Bookchin's thought there is no hint of considering the extension of the political and moral community to other individuals or forms of existence.

This position, qualified, by himself and other authors, as humanist (Bookchin 1974; 1982; Marshall 1992; Smith 2007) and clearly anthropocentric, distances him from other eco-anarchist philosophies. Hence, for example, the internal tensions between social ecology and anarcho-primitivism (Smith 2007), to which we should also add the deep ecology. The discrepancies lie in the interpretation of how the human being has evolved until to fall in a planetary global crisis. Bookchin's vision is more optimistic, believing that technological development has allowed –and not the control of the means of production, as Marxism defends– to place the human species in an unbeatable situation to build a cooperativist and free society, within a well-balanced and intimate relationship with Nature. In some of his works he fell into a certain instrumentalism, probably inheritance of P. Kropotkin's insights who, in M. Hall's opinion, considered that Nature was “something that humanity has to grapple with, to fight and to colonise” (Hall 2011, 378); or when Bakunin considered that “Man ... can and should conquer and master this external world. He, on his part, must subdue it and wrest from it his freedom and humanity” (Maximoff 1953). On the other hand, the vision of anarcho-primitivism is that human race tends towards an increasingly wider and therefore disturbing distance with Nature, which requires a return to a primitive state or early stages of evolution, in order to recover the link with what offers us subsistence and durability on this planet. That is, to achieve the abolition of State by a process of rewilding.

In addition, Bookchin showed a considerably dissident attitude, almost derogatory, with those positions in defence of Nature that make an alleged naive and illusory restoration to Nature, through its sacralisation, spiritualisation or anthropomorphism. To reinforce this thesis, H. Bull warns that ecological degradation and all the *sins* assigned to the State (such as violence, injustice, power abuse) were somehow already in pre-statist societies. Indeed, for Bookchin, this excess of *romanticism* has reached the point to constitute one of the ideological foundations of the most shameful state-totalitarian projects, through the defence of a naturalistic nationalism, which had its apogee in Nazism: “deep ecology is subject to the dangers represented by earlier antirational and intuitionist worldviews that, carried over into the political realm, have produced antihumanistic and even genocidal movements” (Biehl and Bookchin 1995). In any case, and according to the right conclusion of M. Smith, “deep ecology ‘allies’ cannot be dismissed as irrational nature mystics sliding down a slippery slope to eco-fascism without engaging in serious historical distortions and omissions” (Smith 2007, 476).

Finally, we may stress the divergence between bioregionalists and social ecologists, especially notorious in the way of conceiving a green community organization: “Bioregionalists tend to be more committed to the principle of autarky, whereas social ecologists advocate confederal structures” (Davidson 2009, 49). The future management natural resources scarcity is not very far from the irruption of national autarkic projects, led by coercive and neo-fascist politics, and raised by the society in representative democracies. This non anarchist scenario show, however, similarities with the bioregionalist proposal, imagining communities based on the self-management of local resources and the defence of a *patriotic* idea of Nature: “decentralism (and) self-sufficiency... do not constitute a guarantee that we will achieve a rational ecological society. In fact (these principles) have at one time or another supported parochial communities, oligarchies, and even despotic regimes” (Bookchin 1989). For bioregionalism, the State is a not a requisite, but this does not mean that it must be abolished. It is understood that “the quality of social relations within stateless communities is such that the laws, procedures and institutions of the state are unnecessary for governance” (Barry 1996: 114).

## Final Remarks

After this analysis, the different ecologically-oriented strands of anarchism deal with a central idea: the incompatibility between free, local and sustainable communities and the State as a hierarchical, oppressive and coercive body, in order to challenge a more responsible and proper management of environmental issues. In fact, anarchists may contribute to influence a critical side of environmentalism which considers the role of environmental state as non-negotiable. Indeed, according to Davidson: “many greens have attempted to take on board eco-anarchist criticisms of current state structures when formulating their own account of what a green state would look like” (Davidson 2009, 49). Evidently, for eco-anarchists, any more sustainable future would involve the dismantling of governmental institutions. A proper and successful environmental management would demand not bureaucratized and centralized polities, on the line of libertarian municipalism or bioregionalist confederalism. But, following Bookchin, it would not be enough its elimination from the political organizations of societies. In fact, hierarchy and abuse of power are exercised in different strata and areas of society; so, this would require a process of decolonization of the “statist imaginary”. More extravagant and unrealizable seem the anarcho-primitivist proposal, though it may be a source of inspiration thinking in biocentric and ecocentric positions in ethics and politics.

To this regard, it would be intricate to undertake the role of technology in this transition, since this has been frequently associated to the exercise of bureaucratized power and to a vertical and linear way of managing problems: standardized procedures, instrumentalization of the use of Nature, dependency from green technologies to implement solutions, liberation of responsibilities to citizens and little initiative to reflection, education and household practices. Thus, eco-anarchists should work to clarify the weight of technology in an emancipatory and sustainable transition and would be recommendable revisit Lewis Mumford’s theory about “megamachine” (Mumford 1967; Mumford 1970). A deeper reflection and theorization are also missing on how the State and governmental institutions, as well as the function of the public sphere, have negatively affected the environmental conception and concerning that society has today. For instance, the analysis political organization of societies should be complemented and enriched with: the examination of individual versus collective behaviours in the management of Nature; the exploration of the idea of Nature in pre-statist and statist societies and; the analysis of how politics of Nature has been determinant in the consolidation of modern idea of State, etc.

This obviously requires an interpretative framework that integrates approaches involving other disciplines such as environmental psychology, environmental history, ecological anthropology or historical geography, along with political ecology. In addition, decolonial approaches of eco-anarchism and *buen vivir* are needed to make visible other forms of social organization not mediated by hierarchical and centralizing structures (Barrera-Bassols and Barrera 2018). Probably, it is time to recycle many of the insights of eco-anarchists, from the early to the contemporary approaches, in order to build a more adequate post-statist theory to the current context. Being extraordinarily useful and valued, perhaps there is too much reverence for these approaches, requiring a necessary and fertile revision. Something Bookchin dropped when he considered that anarchism, in the analysis of the roots of the ecological crisis, must go beyond the State. Even more, when, at the present moment, we are facing new ways of oppression and authority on Internet, by means of, for instance, the use of social networks, the frenetic production of fake information and the post-truth. In any case, the role of anarchism in a transition to a fruitful relationship with Nature seems out of doubt and “is thus scientifically vindicated and presented as the only possible alternative to the threatening ecological extinction” (Marshall 1992).

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