

Green Leviathan, ecological insurance agency, or capitalism's agent?

Revisiting the Ecological State in the Anthropocene

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Recent decades have seen important research on the instruments, institutions and politics of environmental policy, often in a comparative perspective. In international relations, the creation of ever new environmental regimes has been well explored. What is missing, however, is a systematic inquiry into the repercussions of its growing environment-related activities on the discipline's understanding of the state. This workshop aims at creating bridges between environmental policy analysis and political theory to narrow this gap and develop a research agenda.

Starting out as a fringe issue in the mid-1960's, environmental protection is now considered a core area of state involvement and responsibility in most developed and many developing countries. In the process, the underlying rationale of environmental policy has radically changed from predominantly defensive protection of endangered species, places and resources to environmental management at global scale and the promotion of radical transformative change of social and economic systems (Messner, Schellnhuber, et al. 2010). In the age of Anthropocene (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill 2007), even the notion of 'environment' as the object of ecological policy has become problematic.

In reaction to this widening set of responsibilities for the environment states have built up a considerable administrative, institutional and legislative capacity, devoted substantial proportions of public spending towards environmental protection and restoration, and increased the proportion of tax revenues stemming from environmentally related activities. Taken together, these developments make it warranted to speak of an emerging *ecological state*. States have also broadened their realm of authority and – often through international cooperation – created and altered a range of property rights linked to formerly freely

accessible common pool resources such as water, the atmosphere and genetic resources.

While these developments have not gone unnoticed by political scientists, we face a dearth of more encompassing interpretations and explanations. Are we witnessing the extension and intensification of a Leviathan model of the state whose dominion has always encompassed the domination over and exploitation of natural resources, domestically and through colonial rule? Does increased competition over scarce resources herald a renaissance of the Hobbesian state? Is the environmental state the materialisation of ecologically enlightened reason and the people's insurance agency against potentially disastrous declines in eco-system services? Is the state-sponsored creation of ecological knowledge, so instrumental for agenda-setting and management, the latest element of Foucauldian type governance growing transnational? Or is the environmental state the cynical agent of a globalised capitalistic economy whose logic of exploitation calls for the commodification of ever more 'natural', i.e. traditionally public, goods? A good starting point is probably the striking parallels between the challenges that lead to the emergence of welfare states during the 20th century, and the contemporary challenges presented by accelerating global ecological problems (Meadowcroft 2005). Chief among these similarities is that both welfare states and ecological states are faced with the task of mitigating negative market externalities. Just as the welfare state took on gradually increasing responsibilities for mitigating social and human costs of the market economy, we have for about four decades been witnessing a similar development within the environmental realm. States are gradually accepting increasing responsibilities for addressing ecological problems, and are developing more encompassing environmental policy portfolios in order to mitigate the effects of the market's environmental externalities.

Although environmental politics displays a gradual shift from national to international policy arenas, the nation state remains a primary site for environmental policy making, natural resource management, and environmental politics. It is still nation states that manage or mismanage natural resources, reduce or increase emissions of harmful substances into air, water, and soils, stimulate or repress environmentally beneficial behaviour among their citizens, and choose to cooperate or defect from international environmental treaties. Over the past decade research in environmental politics has been increasingly dominated by scholars with a decidedly international orientation to their work (cf. Young 1999; Biermann and Dingwerth 2004; Bäckstrand 2008; O'Neill 2009). 'Global environmental politics' has become the watchword for an orientation to environmental scholarship which emphasises the international dimension of the key environmental problems (such as climate change,

biodiversity loss, ozone depletion, and so on), privileges analysis of trends that cut across national boundaries such as political and economic globalization, and highlights international organizations, bureaucracies, and actors (NGOs, UN organizations, the EU, non state governance bodies such as the FST, etc). Other approaches have focussed on collective action problems arising from transnational common goods (e.g., Holzinger 2008). Although much has been learned from this rapidly growing literature there has arguably been a neglect of state environmental action – which still provides the foundation for environmental protection around the world. A key objective of this workshop is to begin to set right this neglect.

Despite its key role in addressing accelerating processes of environmental degradation, the emergence of the ecological state has gone largely unnoticed by the research community. Often perceived as a source of both environmental protection and degradation, the state has traditionally been met with a certain amount of ambivalence by environmentalists and scholars of environmental politics (Barry and Eckersley 2005). This ambivalence notwithstanding, a handful of studies mapping different aspects of the emergence of environmental states can be found in the literature (Jänicke and Weidner 1997; Dryzek, Hunold et al. 2002; Barry and Eckersley 2005; Dryzek 2005; Holzinger, Knill et al. 2008; Meadowcroft 2012).

In relation to available research in the area, this workshop seeks to contribute to the study of environmental politics and state theory in three ways. The first is an explicit ambition “to *bring the state back in*” to research on environmental politics and policy. Establishing the state as an object of study for scholars of environmental politics, and examining the limits and prospects of the state as a form of social and political organization in the face of the challenges of global environmental change, is thus a core objective of the workshop.

The second ambition is to rediscover a *comparative perspective* on environmental politics and state theory. Early classics in environmental politics often had a pronounced comparative outlook (Enloe 1975; Lundqvist 1980), when trying to understand how the political system was responding to environmental problems. Later comparative studies have mainly focussed on mapping the proliferation of environmental institutions and instruments (Jaenicke and Weidner 1997, Knill, Holzinger 2008) and on explaining environmental performance (Jahn 1998; Scruggs 2003; D), while less effort has been devoted to analyzing and theorizing cross-national differences and similarities in environmental policy making, resource management,

and environmental politics. Given the growing importance of ecological policies in most states, this omission means that cross national variation in an emergent core area of state activity is currently under-theorised.

The third ambition is to encourage deeper reflection within the political research community about *the overall evolution of contemporary states once environmental issues become central -- especially in relation to understanding interactions among core state imperatives and functions*. Modern states balance complex and inter-related claims and activities including security, economic management and welfare provision. Linkages across these domains are becoming increasingly explicit and appear essential to reform: consider, for example, the recent emergence of the ‘green growth agenda’ in the context of the ongoing financial crisis (Feindt/Cowell 2010), and contemporary calls for ‘greening’ or ‘decarbonising’ the welfare state (Meadowcroft 2012). Appreciating such interactions and how they may be addressed within the context of existing democratic institutions is an important challenge for political analysts.

Through this focus on the state in a comparative perspective, and given the increasing centrality of environmental protection, the workshop hopes to initiate a research agenda on the ecological state that might, in the long term, parallel the achievements of established research programs into the state, such as welfare state regimes, varieties of capitalism, and democratization.

However, we presently have a very limited understanding of the ecological state. A number of core research issues remain unanswered: First, what have been the historical patterns in the development of environmental states and the driving forces behind their evolution? Second, how do environmental states differ in the configuration of their governance arrangements (i.e. policy portfolios, institutions, actor networks), and how can these differences (as well as the cross national similarities) be explained? Third, what are the structural – socio-economic, cultural, technological, institutional, ecological – features that enable and constrain the activities of ecological states. Fourth, how do attempts to manage ecological issues relate to other major state concerns, especially economic management and welfare reform? Fifth, what are the prospects for the ecological state in addressing processes of global environmental change? Sixth, what are the normative foundations of the environmental state – what ethic underpins its activities and its claims in relation to other state concerns?

We invite workshop participants committed to setting the development of the ecological state at the core of their analysis from across the political and policy sciences. We expect political theorists and comparativists to constitute the core of the group, but there will be a place also for specialists in national environmental politics and those who have focused on cross national trends (such as policy instrument diffusion). This workshop will be united by the theme of the ecological state and we plan deliberately to attract papers of multiple types – theory, comparative, empirical and case studies. A special issue in the *Journal for Environmental Policy and Planning* with contributions from the workshop is planned.

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