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Citation for final published version:

Ioris, Antonio A. R. 2015. Theorizing state-environment relationships: Antinomies of flexibility and legitimacy. *Progress in Human Geography* 39 (2) , pp. 167-184.
10.1177/0309132513516893

Publishers page:

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Theorizing State-Environment Relationships: Antinomies of Flexibility and Legitimacy. Ioris, A.A.R.

In: Progress in Human Geography (2015)

Theorising State-Environment Relationships: Antinomies of Flexibility and Legitimacy

“For the fate of Charles the First, hath only made kings more subtle – not more just”
Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776)

Abstract: Scholarly work in geography has often fallen short of establishing the politicised connections between socioecological pressures, spatial dynamics and the changing patterns of the state apparatus. It is still necessary to better examine the failures of the responses to ecological problems in relation to the underlying politico-ideological factors that constraint state interventions. Environmental governance has been particularly influenced by Hegelian political theories about flexibility and legitimacy. The persistence of problems largely derives from the idealism of the Hegelian constitutional plan, which have facilitated the advance of capitalism over the more-than-human spheres of socionature mediated and promoted by the contemporary state.

State, Socionature and Human Geography

This article will examine the socioecological repercussions of state action, the sociospatial consequences of environmental policies and the politics underpinning environmental statehood. Because of its many responsibilities and geographical interventions, the contemporary state has become a key socioecological (or socionatural, considering the hybrid ontology of the world, simultaneously ‘social’ and ‘natural’) player and its multiple socioecological interactions not only help to define state formations, but also contribute to either challenge or legitimise state institutions. The green agenda of the state is never inherently conservationist and not automatically endorsed by wider society, but the action of the state denotes values and assumptions that are integral to processes of political dispute, as ecological politics and the rationale of environmental management constitute, primarily, a struggle for the control of state’s functional capacity (Healy, 2012). As an environmental actor, the state is more internally fractured and contradictory than as a provider of welfare and national security (Robbins, 2008). Environmental statehood, by its turn, is more than just the administration of public matters over resources and ecosystems, but comprises the affirmation of specific ideologies and techniques of socioecological organisation. Material processes and political disputes represent important ‘geography makers’ that help to shape the state (Mann, 2009).

Our starting point is the recognition of the state – particularly in the complexity of today’s world – as both a mediator and a locus of socionatural change and sociospatial transformation. Likewise, the apparatus of the state (considering not only its form, but function, language and political commitments) is more than simply a collection of agencies and regulatory instruments, but it comprises structures and strategies that reflect the balance of political power and the growth of social antagonisms (Lefebvre, 2008). This is evident, for example, in the case of economic development policies, large engineering constructions and the exploration of biodiversity and mineral reserves sponsored by the state. Regions and locations, as well as national territories, constitute important arenas for state action and state restructuring (Brenner, 2004). Moreover, although socioecological issues have meant a great deal for the reconfiguration of the contemporary state, there is still a need for

concerted scholarly work on the synergies between the responses to ecological problems and the underlying politico-ideological factors that influence the effectiveness of those same responses. This requires a reinterpretation of state theory in a way that posits ecological politics inside, and in relation to, statecraft and public policy-making. Such elaboration is ever more necessary nowadays taking into consideration that the command over nature, as famously announced by Francis Bacon, has mutated into sophisticated policies aimed not only at restraining environmental problems but at justifying and reinvigorating prevailing socioeconomic trends.

Human geographers have certainly offered a significant contribution towards understanding the sociospatial basis of public policies and the involvement of the state in both the response and the creation of problems (particularly in capitalist societies). Geographers have reappraised the spatial attributes of the state associated with administrative action, institutional reforms and changes in discourse. For Kuus and Agnew (2008: 98), the state “has no ontological status apart from the practices that constitute its reality”, that is, it is “constituted out of the representations and practices that are associated with it”. In this case, the sovereignty of the state is constructed and reconstructed through both territorial and non-territorial practices operating in its name (rather than a pre-existing subjectivity and agency of the state), while state power is exercised territorially over ‘blocks of space’. Clark and Dear (1984) emphasise the sociospatial consequences of state action and how space has become part of the language of the state. These authors demonstrate that the state apparatus structures the sociospatial organisation of capitalist society, for instance through the regulation of commodity production and global markets, forces of economic concentration and decentralisation, transport and labour market policies, and core-periphery integration. The semi-autonomy of the state is principally related to the state’s territorial centrality and its unique ability to provide territorialised forms of organisation (Mann, 1984). According to Taylor (1999), the way state practice and is influenced by politics is premised upon territoriality and issues of scale (from the household to the nation and the global arena).

New areas of state intervention of interest to geographers have included the dilemmas posed by institutional strategies for environmental risks (Gandy, 1999), the framing of national natures through ideological and material processes (Whitehead et al., 2007), the developmental role and local mediations of state power (Silvey, 2010), the interplay between globalisation and localisation under neoliberalism (Peck, 2001), the promotion of novel spatial concepts (e.g. river basin management) and scalar connections (Sneddon and Fox, 2011), service provision and state reforms as part of a broader set of processes underway in affluent capitalist societies (Tickell, A. 2001) and the role of civil society and NGOs in the production and management of new territories (Brannstrom et al., 2004). However, the wider politico-ecological relevance of the capitalist state and the barriers for dealing with the conservation of the commons have not yet received enough theoretical and analytical treatment. For example, Clark and Dear (1984) fail to fully perceive the emerging importance of environmental issues for the reform, legitimacy and contestation of the capitalist state apparatus. This represents a missed opportunity, particularly for political geographers working on state reforms, neoliberal agendas and the failures of contemporary policy-making. The result is a palpable gap in the comprehension of the achievements, failures and possibilities of state interventions, as much as in the actual socioecological embeddedness of state activity. The socioecological complexity of the state needs to be carefully examined taking into account its spatial, temporal and

political 'signature', resulting in macro and micro processes of conflict and cooperation around the valuation, access and command over socio-nature. The state connects different scales and spatial configurations of environmental issues and responds to environmental problems through various spatial approaches. The state is not a monolithic entity, but rather a 'material condensation' of forces and social relations, as famously described by Poulantzas (1978). Instead of something given in advance, there is a constant production of the state through every day practices that respond for the dynamic 'geographies of stateness' (Painter, 2006).

There is, thus, a strong case for a rapprochement between work on state theory, sociospatial phenomena and ecological politics. This means addressing state interventions from a critical perspective and, ultimately, crafting a politico-ecological framework of the state. It is required dealing with two different forms of environmental politics, one more implicit (consisting of policies and practices that lie outside the arenas conventionally labelled as 'environmental' and where the state always played a crucial role) and the more explicit politics shaped by treaties, legislation and multiple forms of regulation (Conca, 1993). So far, most of the academic literature, by geographers and other scholars, has focused too much on the reformulation and implementation of state policies (Jones, 1998), state power (Allen and Cochrane, 2010) and the imposition of spatial ordering (Nuijten et al., 2012) but has paid less attention to ontological and ideological changes in the state produced by disputes over socioecological demands and impacts. It has been frequently neglected that the "control and management of nature has always been central to the realization and consolidation of state power" (Whitehead et al., 2007: 6). Even the examination of environmental politics – including the three main worldviews: individualism and free-market conservatism, biocentrism and deep ecology, and socialist and libertarian environmentalism (Dryzek and Lester, 1989) – rarely deals with the foundations of state dilemmas. Moreover, whereas there is extensive theorisation of concepts such as sustainable development (e.g. Dobson, 1998) and ecological modernisation (e.g. Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000), there is only partial consideration of the politics that informs the socioecological responses by the state.

There remains a limited conceptual understanding of the green commitments of the state in recent decades, which have been paradoxically related to a spatial disjuncture between the territorially-organised state and the spatiality of ecological problems, as well as with a tendency towards domination, disempowering and violence constantly perpetrated by the state (Paterson et al., 2006). For instance, Paehlke and Torgerson (2005) associate the administrative state with an environmental Leviathan and, while they ask for a more active involvement of social groups in state policies, they fail to address the underlying economic inequalities shaping the possibilities of state action in favour of deprived groups. Eckersley (1992, 2004) insists on the importance of an ecocentric approach supporting deliberative democracy to usher a solution to the ecological crisis, but she too easily associates critical environmental politics (e.g. ecosocialism) with anthropocentrism and, as a result, misses the opportunity to connect the political agency of the working class with the creativity of the environmentalist movement. What is more, Bernstein (2001) identifies as causes of the environmental problems the misbehaviour of individuals or the lack of a proper economic treatment of ecological processes, while Hayward (1998) argues that political theory needs to deal with the opportunities available for civil society to change policy-making and Conca (2006) examines the struggles for the institutionalisation of the 'nonstate' through elusive quests for integration and public participation. These last authors stop short of establishing the deeper

connections between socioecological pressures, class-based disputes and the changing patterns of the state.

The aim here is to address the core complexity of the politicised ecologies affected by the intervention of the contemporary state, which is a process of major geographical relevance. This article will indicate how some of the main challenges affecting contemporary environmental policy-making reflect prominent debates about the configuration and social responsibilities of the state held almost two hundred years ago at the dawn of industrial capitalism. Now, as much as then, the emergence and persistence of socioecological disputes between groups and countries are concentrated in and largely reworked through the intervention, and biases, of the state. With the consolidation of the capitalist society, one of the main tasks of the state is the naturalisation and maximisation of anti-commons institutions, as well as the administration of the socioecological impacts of relations of production. Those responses have achieved a level of unprecedented sophistication in recent years under the agenda of environmental governance. The achievements and limitations of today's environmental statehood can be particularly explained with a Marxist critique of the theories of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his long legacy in terms of idealising and legitimising a flexible, but intrinsically conservative, state rationality. The Hegelian theory of the state entails a flexible, adaptive configuration that provides the political legitimacy and regulatory elasticity associated with contemporary environmental policy-making. It should be noted that the readings of Hegel's political elaboration in the Anglo-American world have been influenced by idealist philosophy since the beginning of the 20th Century, but it lost its appeal during the period of authoritarianism and Keynesian economics. Only when the welfare-developmental state started to show its insurmountable contradictions that Hegelian politics, even implicitly, started to make sense again. Such multilevel and multidimensional complexity requires a robust theorisation able to unpack the politicised connections between state, space and the production of socationature. In order to discuss that, it is first required to situate our discussion in the wider context of the critical theories of the state, as discussed next.

The Marxist Perspective(s): Problems and Problematization

Most political science approaches recognise today three main theories of the modern state, namely, Pluralist, Elitist (or Managerialist) and Marxist interpretations. While Pluralism emphasises the centrality of social groups and political parties interacting and being represented by the state, Elitism underscores the asymmetries of power in society and the critical influence of political elites on state action. It is not possible here to revisit in detail those two interpretations (see Alford and Friedland, 1985; Hay, 2006; Cudworth et al., 2007), but it is central to our argument to demonstrate that ecology state-environment theorisation can particularly benefit from a Marxist perspective of the totality of spatial relations between state, economy and socationature. The intervention of the state in the environmental arena is an integral feature of the expansion of capitalism and of the intensification of socioecological contradictions. Different than in previous socioeconomic formations, the capitalist management of socationature entails more than the procurement of raw materials and territorial power, as changes in the physical and symbolic configuration of nature were brought to the centre of capital accumulation. The Marxist contribution is relevant to comprehend that capitalism is ultimately a socioeconomic system based on the double, interrelated exploitation of labour power and of (the rest of) socationature.

In that sense, the separation of the labourer from the means of production mirrors the alienation of individuals from their socio-natural condition.

Even though the association between capitalism and the state varies from country to country (Badie and Birnbaum, 1983; Wood, 2002), contemporary environmental questions are, essentially, located in the possibilities and limitations of capitalist relations of production and reproduction overseen, and affected, by the state. Considering that the broader reproduction of capitalism is a main sphere of state responsibility (Fine and Harris, 1979), a key dilemma of the contemporary state is exactly the need to exercise leadership on behalf of the wider society and simultaneously defend the interests of the stronger politico-economic groups. Changes in the environmental agenda are also derived from the need to legitimise state action and validate production and consumption activities. Contemporary environmental problems are not only derived from the failures of the state to arbitrate contradictory demands, but it is the result of the convergence of hegemonic interests around the organisation and running of the state. Environmental statehood constitutes an ensemble of organisations and institutions that emerged in the Western countries and then expanded to most of the world, especially through the intervention of the internationalised state and multilateral agencies such as UNEP, World Bank and FAO (Ioris, 2012a). It is important also to examine how relations and processes materialise on the ground and are negotiated on everyday basis, given that individuals not only suffer but are able to react, reinvent and often benefit, at least to some extent, from mainstream environmental policies. Consequently, a class-based perspective can provide a systemic and integrated investigation of the origins of environmental problems and problematize the failure of prevailing solutions, whilst at the same time address structural differences, environmental injustices and sociospatial exclusion happening through politicised socio-natural interactions. That is because the geography of the state is an important part of the advance of capitalism over the human and, increasingly, the more-than-human spheres of socio-nature.

Although Marx only left a fragmented theory of the state, he understood it as the expression of social balance of power (but with a degree of relative autonomy), as much as the effect of state forms and activities on the production and realisation of value (Ollman, 2003). As demonstrated by Marx (1913), dominant class politics is neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure state reproduction of class relations, but the connections between state and class politics (including sub-sections of classes) are both contingent and non-linear. Economic issues are certainly prominent and trigger state action in multiple and unexpected ways, or, as put by Poggi (1978), under capitalism the economy subordinates and reduces the importance of other factors. Marx's attack on the bourgeois state was a humanist, radically democratic proposition to release civil society from the inherent contradiction of an economy that keeps evolving through the strategic connections between state, hegemonic classes and class fragments (see Marx and Engels, 1974). Following that initial Marxian elaboration, there has been a long debate about the interconnection between the economic and the political realms of state interventions, that is, the action of the state not only in relation to the interests of the capitalist class but also in terms of the need to secure the cohesion of society as a whole (Clarke, 1991). The 'state question' has occupied a prominent position in Marxist discussions, which started with Engels (1972) and his contention that the state as a necessary evil for the exploitation of labour, Lenin's (1932) claim that the bourgeois state must be smashed and replaced by a proletarian government and Gramsci's (1971) theory of the state based on force and consent.

The crisis of the welfare regime and the political unrest in the late 1960s provided an opportunity for Marxist authors to renew the scrutiny of the state (Jessop, 1977). More literal readings of Marx's and Engel's texts, such as by Mandel (1969), tried to situate the state as the product of class conflicts and operates on behalf of the ruling class, while other interpretations, such as the 'capital logic' school, attempted to derive the general form of the state from the capitalist mode of production (Holloway and Picciotto, 1978) and assert that the state is the 'ideal collective capitalist' that operates independently of the actions of individual capitalists (Altvater, 1973). Because of the perceived ahistoricism of those claims, the 'regulationist' school tried to portray the state as the manager that compensates for the crisis between production and consumption (Aglietta, 1979), whereas Offe (1984) argued that the main problem with the welfare state was the contradiction between private ownership of industry and socialisation of production. The most notorious positions of this period were advanced by Miliband (1969), who insisted that the institutions comprising the state (such as parliament, government, policy and the judiciary) are colonised and primarily represent the capitalist class (that is, the state has significant power by it is a theoretical abstraction on behalf of the bourgeoisie), and by Poulantzas (1967), who disagreed by saying that capitalist power permeates the state in a more systematic manner and that connects the structures of society and the state.

Clark and Dear (1984) criticise both Poulantzas, Miliband and others for being too society-centred (i.e. the nature of the state deriving from the logic of capitalism itself) and for neglecting the state's relative autonomy and power, while Jessop (1982) ventures to find a middle ground (although closer to Poulantzas) with his strategic-relational approach that depicts the state as an institutional ensemble of power centres that does not exist in isolation of wider disputes, but its authority conforms with political economy and is embedded in social relations. A more general criticism is that state theory is still a major 'hole' in the Marxist literature, particularly because of the tendency to either insist on the reification of the state (Abrams, 1988) or abandon historico-materialist readings of the state to fall back into liberal or conservative legal theories (Macnair, 2006). Therefore, a key task for Marxist authors has been to move away from the structuralist-functionalist boundaries of the recent debate (Clarke, 1991) and produce a more robust theorisation of the tacit separation of the state from the capitalist class and its dealings with the other class-based demands (including socioecological issues), as much as provide a better understanding of the constraints of state interventions and of its striving to foster unity in a fragmented society. There is still an evident need for Marxists, geographers in particular, to examine the rationality, appearance and function of the state and how the production of environmental statehood has affected state discourse, action and legitimacy.

One main contribution of Marxist authors has been the separation between appearance and reality, which is required to understand the fetishized, mystified form of the class content that permeates the state (Wells, 1981). The state can then be appreciated in its permanent, often contradictory, interplay with society and the rest of nature, as much as any examination of the state needs to encompass the broader, highly politicised evolution of the socionatural world (Ioris, 2012b). As a result, three main geographical points seem to immediately require further investigation, namely, the organisation and configuration of the state, the motivations and rationality of environmental responses, and the possibilities and limitations of state interventions. First, the formation of a dedicated nucleus of environmental policy and regulation within the state apparatus, especially since the 1970s, was both a reaction to civil society pressures and the complaints of groups more directly impacted by

environmental degradation and also a response to inter-capitalist tensions and rising production costs due to ecological disruption and artificially created scarcities (e.g. scarcity of land, water and biodiversity products). Nonetheless, even with its growing complexity, the environmental branches of the state are normally instigated by foreign organisations and devoid of real power to face up to politico-economic hegemonic pressures (*vis-à-vis* the failure of public transport policies against the use of the private car). The contradictions between various state policies mean that, in practice, the environmental agencies of the state are typically relegated to only a secondary level of importance.

Second, the main motivation of the state to intervene in environmental matters is to contain socioecological disputes overflowing into class-based conflicts. Environmental policies and legislation serve, first and foremost, to systematise the access and ownership of parts of socionature that have economic or political relevance, as well as reduce production costs and uncertainties. Environmental responses by the state are also required because of the non coincidence in time and space of the causes of environmental degradation and the actual realisation of those impacts (i.e. a time-lag and space-lag phenomenon). It means that the protection of nature is only an incidental objective and the primary reason of state action in environmental matters is an anti-commons requirement of capitalist production, which is conveyed through the management and circumstantial preservation of the same commons. At the same time, although environmental statehood is primarily concerned with the amelioration of existing capitalist conditions, the specific interventions of the state can sometimes temporarily contradict that aim. Marx (1981) aptly identifies moments when interactions among the capitalist class lead to the dissociation between capital ownership and profit generation (i.e. the expansion of finance capital), which can cause monopoly problems and require state intervention. The management of environmental issues has comparable similarities, in the sense that it is also a situation that capital's drive for profit has to be contained, but as a measure to re-establish more general accumulation opportunities. It is "the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself" a "point of transition" to new forms of production (Marx, 1981: 569).

Third, environmental statehood is permanently reformulated and frequently undermined because of the intrinsic limitations of the state and the specific properties of environmental questions, which are unevenly distributed in space, unpredictably connected in time and scale, and associated with high levels of urgency and uncertainty. Many of the failures of public policies and environmental regulation originate not in the political commitments of the state, but derive from the incompetence to coordinate its own interventions (which may answer many of the attacks made on the Marxist theory of the state by van den Berg, 2003). Those issues have represented major challenges for the environmental ability of the Westphalian state. Given the global basis of environmental issues, a state may be responding not only to the hegemonic pressures of the national capitalist class, but also to fractions of classes in foreign countries and opposition groups in those same countries. As pointed out by Poulantzas (1967: 65), the Marxist conception of politics "enables us to explain the possibility of *social formations in which there are 'disjunctions' between the class whose mode of production ultimately imposes its dominant political role on the one hand and the objective structures of the state on the other.* (...) This will lead us to the following conclusion: there may be sizeable disjunctions between *the politically dominant class and the objective structures of the State.*"

The above three points help to start unveiling the environmental dimension of the contemporary state, in particular the specific features of the responses to environmental problems formulated under the aegis of ‘governance’ (instead of simply government). Governance, instead of conventional government, is described as the pursuit of more flexible strategies and mechanisms of public administration to accomplish policy goals, realise values and manage environmental risks and impacts. This is expected to be achieved through the re-regulation of conservation and of the use of natural resources, which amalgamate state-oriented and market-oriented approaches (Ioris, 2010). The interpretation of governance often makes use of the Foucauldian notion of governmentality and the bio-power of the state through a plurality of interventions in health, hygiene and environmental issues. Power is seen dispersed throughout society and is a positive force in the creation and change of behaviour (Foucault, 1977), which in the environmental arena has led to the formation of new expert knowledge, social practices, regulatory approaches and subjectivities (Agrawal, 2005). However, the analysis informed by Foucault is of little assistance to understand state action and failures, given that it essentially diverts the attention away from the state. A more accurate assessment of the peculiarities of environmental governance in the capitalist world should focus on sociopolitical relations that permeate and are encouraged by the state, instead of restricting the analysis to explanations that tends to minimise the socioecological centrality of the state as both a mediator and a champion of the demands of groups, classes and class-fractions.

As already mentioned above, the disagreement between Hegel and Marx, where the first strived to perfect the emerging state of industrial capitalism and the second called for the withering away of the (capitalist) state, has huge, although somehow surprising, relevance nowadays. The tortuous evolution of environmental statehood has reproduced, in a small and sectoral scale, the clashes between those two main thinkers of the nascent capitalist world mainly because the grave environmental contradictions of modern-day capitalism, with all the geographical and historical differences, have parallels with the socioeconomic and political challenges of the early 19th Century. Different than Hegel (2008), Marx rejected the view that the state could be described as an all-encompassing political community functioning according to an ethical appeal and acting as the fulfilment of reason. In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1975) shows how Hegel, through a skilful handling of ethics and dialectics, ultimately reduced civil society to economic society. That resembles the reduction of the complexity of ecosystems to the narrow language of money and the techno-bureaucracy of computer models that characterise today’s prevailing approaches to environmental regulation and management. Hegelian ideals have actually inspired the neopragmatism of ecological modernisation (Davidson, 2012), whose “normalisation of practices tends to obscure their philosophical premises and the separation of theory from practise, finance from politics, policy from implementation” (Irwin, 2007: 648). Hegelianism is largely centred on the spreading of universalisms among particularities and a subtle legitimacy through the homogenisation of politics and the promotion of reason. In the next section, the Hegelian foundations of political reforms and their impact on environmental governance will be further analysed.

Questioning the Basis of Contemporary Environmental Statehood

The continuities and divergences between Marx and Hegel are complex and have been the object of an interminable debate for more than a century. To be sure,

most of Marx's analysis of the Hegelian political thinking was very selective and done early in his life. The young Marx was a member of the group of Left-Hegelians and was influenced by the humanism of some of its key members, such as Bauer and Feuerbach. The group debated over Prussian politics, religion and sociology, criticised the idealisation of the state by the old Hegelians and attacked Hegel himself for failing to deal with what they called 'the living man', the sensuous person who actually thinks, feels and creates his/her own existence over any generalisation. The young Hegelians strongly rejected that the state could claim its legitimacy on religious grounds, because the corruption and despotism of the state was actually considered the embodiment of religion. Involved in these discussions, Marx increasingly radicalised his political positions, rejected Hegelian idealism and Left-Hegelianism, and shifted his criticism away from religion and towards private property and the ownership of capital (Berlin, 1978). If Hegel discarded the notion of social contract of Rousseau and Kant in favour of a constitutional formula based on the rational state, as the spiritualised form of the 'Idea' (Chaskiel, 2005), in his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* Marx (1970) rebuffed Hegel's argument that reality was a predicate of the Idea, the actual subject of historical development.

The influence of Hegel on Marx has been a matter of fierce scholarly debate and has given room to many interpretations. It is clear that if Marx remained always a Hegelian (at least in terms of his analytical and interpretative methods), he tried to bring politics to the centre of social and economic analyses and set his assessment of the state on the course of transformative revolution and comprehensive social and spatial inclusion. What is more important is that Marx's long and hard attempt to overcome the Hegelian mystification of the state and his effort to move beyond Hegel's immanence-transcendence approach have close parallels with the removal of the alienated basis of environmental governance proposed in the present essay. The main goal of the contemporary governance agenda is the transition from rigid, monothematic environmental regulation into more responsive interventions, which betray the influence of Hegelian political thinking. The centralised and bureaucratic style of the environmental management policies of the previous Keynesian state was criticised for being ineffective, expensive and too divisive. That led to the emergence of new forms of environmental negotiation at the national and international levels (Hurrell, 1994). Instead of approaches centred on absolute limits to economic development and population growth (Daly, 1973; Ehrlich, 1968; Meadows et al., 1974), there was a gradual shift towards more flexible public policies. It has represented an important chapter of the broader strategies attempting to redraw the public-private divide (Bernstein, 2001).

The institutionalisation of sustainable development faced other related obstacles, in particular the inadequate grasp of the triangular relationship between environmental problems, globalisation and state dynamics (Park et al., 2008). However, what has not been adequately recognised yet is that the flexibility and legitimacy required for this conservative institutional renovation need to be situated in the wider perspective of Western political thought under the influence of the Hegelian theory of the state. Although calls for governance and sustainable development brought a promise of improved environmental statehood, in practice most controversial questions were pushed into the background in favour of pragmatic, market-based approaches that did not question the dominant ideology of ecological modernisation (Brand, 2010). Informed by the Hegelian thinking, today's environmental statehood can combine macro and micro scales of power control with subtle forms of justification and policy enforcement. Beyond the liberalism of Locke,

the liberal-utilitarianism of Mill and Bentham, and the bureaucratic-rationalisation of Weber, the political and moral claims of Hegel provided, although in most cases indirectly, the intellectual tools for the adoption of the agenda of environmental governance. The connections between dynamic scales of interaction action remain a main expression of state influence, particularly through the dissolution of the previous Fordist sociospatial fix (MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999).

Hegel had a highly sophisticated and cunning design for the state, in the sense that he was averse to frenzied subjectivities and defended an individuality that was meant to be subsumed into corporations and estates, that is, the individual should be fused with the universality of the community (Levine, 2009). He didn't see the state as primarily the safeguard of people's self-interest, but as the guardian of a moral life and universal altruism (Avineri, 1972). Along those lines, he claimed to resolve the fundamental tension between the public and private through a 'mediation of the will' between the family, civil society and the state. In effect, Hegel's state system only makes sense as the human approximation of the perfect political model, that is, the concept of a moral state to be pursued through ethical life. According to Hegel, the whole ethical basis of the state emanates from the Idea, the spirit, the absolute essence. Hegel indicated that the ultimate endeavour was to "*apprehend and present the state as something inherently rational*" (Hegel, 2008: 15). As a result, Hegel emphasised the coincidence between world history and rationality that places the state as the guarantor of systematic reason. The realisation ('actualisation', in the Hegelian terminology) of reason is the fundamental purpose of the state, as the conveyor of the perfect social order and the conciliator of conflicts of interest. For Hegel, because the state is seen as 'inherently rational', it can naturally become the main promoter and defender of reason and, therefore, a supposedly legitimate force in the course of historical change.

Probably the most influential feature of Hegel's political argument is exactly the adaptive configuration of the state over and above the bare affirmation of power and the most immediate demands of the stronger (propertied) social groups. The Hegelian state "is a dynamic institution that sees Right developing as determinate action, within the context of society bringing back every social action to the total determinations of the given rational order" (Negri, 2011: 38). Hegel "tries to find a place in the State *both* for individual liberty *and* for strong government", that is, the state is effective when it allows for self-subsistent individuality (Knox, 1970: 25). In this way, Hegel provided the necessary political legitimacy and regulatory flexibility needed to improve the situation in Prussia still largely characterised by authoritarianism and political centralisation. His political thinking evolved in the dialectical interplay between universal and particular, finite and infinite, state authority and personal initiative. Hegel's thoughts advanced a conceptual rationalisation that was able to reconcile renovation and permanence, rupture and legitimacy, democratic inclusion and (from the perspective of those in control) needed political seclusion. In particular, Hegel's account of statecraft was superior to other comparable theories that described the state above society or subsumed in economic transactions. For instance, Weber's model of ethical rationalisation and institutional embodiment of consciousness is excessively rigid to demonstrate, in a convincing way, the interplay between state, economy and the rest of socionature.

Hegel was certainly an acute observer of the problems and demands of public administration and its hybrid attempts to accommodate the needs of the declining aristocracy and the demands of the emerging, still weak bourgeoisie. His relation with the Prussian State was not one of easy support or justification of an extant political

regime, but Hegel used it as an invitation to reform the state in accordance with principles at work (in varying degrees) within the existing states (Knox, 1970). Different than Fichte (who worked approximately in the same period and saw state functions solely to protect the rights of persons), the Hegelian state is a congregation of estates and corporations – which represent different social sectors – that must operate primarily as a community. The state should become a sophisticated juncture of normative, social and economic driving-forces (Hegel, 1964). Consequently, Hegel anticipated some elements of the constitutional welfarian state in the middle of the last century (Avineri, 1972; Levine, 2009), but at the same time he also provided ammunition for the liberalising experience of the last decades of the 20th Century when national parliaments have lost power and delegated law-making responsibilities to the executive branches of the state and to private enterprises (Trotta, 2009). Although the neoliberal state is sometimes related to the Kantian claim that the only innate human right is freedom, in effect neoliberalism requires a careful combination of market freedom, economic intensification and political legitimisation that also closely follows Hegelian political thinking. That is because Kant (1991), and other 18th Century philosophers, elaborated a more abstract conception of freedom and liberal politics based on the separation between ‘is’ and ‘ought to be’ but Hegel went a step further to argue for a concrete realisation of potentiality in history, for bringing the ideal conceptualisation into actual social interaction.

Before neoliberalism and the globalised society at turn of the 21st Century (when the state is now tested to the limit) there was no real opportunity to fully adopt the Hegelian state model based on the legitimisation of enlightened bourgeois values. It was the European Union project, particularly after the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, that offered the best prospect for the realisation (actualisation) of the Hegelian constitutionalism, especially in the realm of environmental regulation and management. The 1972 Paris meeting of the European Council set the state for a series of policy adjustments and additional legislation focused on environmental issues, but it was in the 1980s that there was growing emphasis on integrated management and pollution prevention; in the 1990s most trade barriers between European countries were removed, including a number of them related to the environment (Lieverink, 1996). In all that, it is possible to find elements of Hegelianism, especially in the search for legitimacy and flexibility. In that process, governance, instead of conventional government, took centre stage as the pursuit of more flexible strategies and mechanisms of public administration that facilitate the accomplishment of socioecological goals, the realisation of values and the management of environmental risks and impacts (OECD, 2011). Environmental policies became increasingly characterised by a more flexible association between market demands and environmental protection. For example, climate change policies shifted from a focus on charges and licences to the centrality of carbon markets and related schemes (such as REDD). Nonetheless, the grand plans for the formation rational, ethical state have been fundamentally contained by the very reasoning of the Hegelian political thinking and his defence of state’s supreme authority and the associated centrality of private economic property.

It is in this context that Marxist ecology can be of great relevance as a tool to understand the limited advances and major contradictions of mainstream responses to environmental issues. The Hegelian thinking that underpins environmental governance, particularly in the European Union, constitutes an attempt to preserve and modernise the bourgeois state in the face of widespread socational tensions. Likewise, the unsustainability of the mainstream sustainability platforms (i.e. the

disjuncture between the environmental discourse and the socioeconomic practice of the state and its main allies) can be explained, first of all, by the Hegelian mistaken identity between the real and the rational (i.e. the real is rational by definition). The naturalisation of environmental problems by the techno-bureaucratic systems of the modern-day state ends up in the endorsement of responses that are considered rational in advance, despite their flagrant irrationality (as in the case of greenhouse gas emission reductions and carbon markets, which nonetheless preserve the reliance of contemporary society on fossil fuels and non-renewable sources of energy). As Marx (1970) already showed, Hegel multiplied antinomies and inconsistencies all over the text of the *Philosophy of Right* with an argument that combines sophisms and speculation. Following the Hegelian claim for rational realism, the contemporary state is the historical necessity of capitalist relations, but it is also predicated upon those same relations and the myriad of socionatural impacts thus produced. Hegel's argument in favour of economic inequalities as the basis of social progress provides contradictory justification for economic growth at the expense of environmental concerns. Hegel had an aprioristic configuration of the state as an idealised entity shaped by reason, while Marx tried – admittedly, with only partial success – to develop a materialist understanding of the political agency that shapes the state.

Another negative influence of Hegel's political framework on environmental governance was the reduction of social and political differences to the 'common' language of money, which was explicitly recommended by Hegel as a mechanism that could strategically forge social collaboration (see Hegel, 2008: 285). Such claim has major relevance nowadays in terms of the monetary quantification of nature and the recognition of private property that are promoted as central priorities by environmental economists. For Hegel, the individual and the state are interconnected and interdependent, but this relationship can only happen if the rule of law preserves the existing institutions of private property and the hierarchisation of political life (Hegel in *Realphilosophie*, quoted in Avineri, 1973). Hegel dismissed the separation of powers proposed by Montesquieu in favour of a unitary, constitutional monarchy reining over (atomised) citizens, as the enforcement of universal principles over particular individuals. Marx, on the contrary, situates the transformation of the state in a much more radical trajectory and singled out one class, the proletariat, as the effective transformer of the state, further than the social contract of Kant and the universalism of the state of Hegel. According to Marx, the capitalist, Hegelian state becomes the perpetuator of alienation also because of its role in enforcing the priority of exchange value over use value. That seems to confirm the shrewd influence of Hegel on the European state system: instead "of having subjects objectifying themselves in public affairs Hegel has public affairs becoming the subjects" (Marx, 1970: 62).

The Hegelian state model may be an improvement when compared with previous state configurations, but its rationale has also the unhelpful effect of containing the possibilities of real democracy. According to Hegel, the state is separated from and emerges out of society, as something dialectically connected with the individual. In the interpretation of Reyburn (1921: 235), the "restraints of public life are the articulations which the [Hegelian] state requires in order to attain its proper unity and organization, and the citizen who is conscious of his identity with the state is made free by them." Hegel put aside the need of explicit democracy and social equality, because it is not individual that needs to be represented in the state but his/her interests that can be presumed, captured through rational thinking. Hegel also accepted plural categories of political difference, but only to the extent that pluralism

observed pre-established boundaries and acquiesced to the narrow space of conventional politics. He developed a complex and highly sophisticated conceptualisation of the state and its metabolism with civil society (the economic realm) and family (the personal realm), but that process left what Plant (1973: 196) calls some “disruptive ambiguities which surrounds Hegel’s philosophy of politics”. As pointed out by Lefebvre (2009: 84), the Hegelian state “does not arbitrate conflicts, it moderates them by keeping them within the limits of the established order.”

The failures of the official responses to collective problems serve to expose the socioecological inadequacies of calls for environmental governance and should provoke a rethinking of contemporary state formations informed by Hegelian political thinking. Instead of the claims made by neo-Hegelians (e.g. Žižek, 2011), according to Hegel the individual is dialectically incorporated (sublated) in the state, but only with the firm containment of his/her needs and within the pre-conceived boundaries of the ‘rational’, bourgeois state. On the one hand, the state is proclaimed the manifestation of an ethical Idea, the actualisation of freedom; on the other hand the supreme duty of the individual is to become a subordinate member of the state. The result is not simply a harmonic separation between private and public life, as claimed by Hegel, but a frontal antagonism between the functions of the state (predicated as right in advance, as the state brings freedom and reason) and the actuality of private life (in Hegelian terms, logically containing a lower level of rationality). For Hegel, as much as for Plato, plain democracy leads to lawlessness, anarchy and departure from the ideal state, eventually paving the road for the emergence of tyrannies. The individual retains his/her ‘free will’ and self-consciousness, but at the cost of having to conform to a preordained plan of public affairs. This type of dialectics is profoundly perverse, because it starts from the Idea (as truth) and the individual is only later given the opportunity, or accomplished the necessity, to be incorporated (sublated) in the Idea. In providing the justification for a system that is based on the double exploitation of society and the rest of nature, the soft-violence of the Hegelian state is the maximisation or potentialisation of violence.

It was in the famous article *On the Jewish Question* that Marx (1975) presented a compelling alternative to the Hegelian mystification of the state. In this analysis of the prospects of religious freedom, Marx subverted the conventional argument about political and religious emancipation. In his view, the political emancipation of the religious person requires, first of all, the emancipation of the state from religion. In other words, it was not enough to secure additional political rights “within the prevailing scheme of things”, especially contained by private property relations and the modern state (Marx, 1975: 221). On the contrary, in order to become a genuine social being (instead of only an abstract citizen), the individual needs to secure his/her human emancipation, which depends on overcoming the separation of the individual from social forces. There is a fundamental message here, which can be applied to explain the fundamental environmental contradictions of the modern state. For Marx, the perfect Christian state is exactly the atheist form of state (as the United States), which grants religious freedom as artefact to paradoxically promote and consolidate a highly religious society. This is a process of partial, mystified emancipation in which the state become free by the individual remains subjugated. Similarly now, the green agenda of the state can only be effective through the recognition of the politicised basis of socioecological problems. Some geographers, such as McGuirk and O’Neill (2012), have highlighted the contested terrain of the state and the possibility of progressive policies in partnership with the state. Nonetheless,

without significant transformations of the state apparatus, those potential improvements would only be localised, fragmented and almost irrelevant (as in the case of current energy saving and waste recycling policies in Britain). Instead of a civil society constituted by objectified citizenship and top-down forms of consensus (which is nowadays reinforced by mass-consumption lifestyles and alienated political consciousness), a critical political ecology should aspire to see a management of public affairs that is not separated from the people, no longer a limit to their freedom.

Conclusions: Overcoming the Hegelianism of Environmental Governance

Starting in the Western countries, more responsive policy-making machineries were instituted by most national governments since the 1970s, which included an extensive review of environmental legislation and of the agencies responsible for monitoring and enforcement of regulatory codes. Following wider economic and political commitments, environmental policies and regulation have been essentially reformist (i.e. responses are formulated after the process of environmental disruption is in place) and politically conservative (i.e. to satisfy mainly the demands of the stronger social groups and the legitimacy needs of the state apparatus itself). The best expression of the selective basis of mainstream responses has been the emphasis on environmental governance, which replaced the previous forms of command-and-control of the welfare-developmental state with calls for public engagement, responsible behaviour and the moral authority of an enlightened politics. The ambiguous, but highly instrumental agenda of environmental governance betrays the influence of Hegelian political philosophy, in the sense that a new generation of environmental regulation – portrayed as the expression of wisdom, higher democracy and scientific aptness – was superimposed over a socionatural reality with growing environmental impacts and associated conflicts.

Though the Marxian analysis of the Hegelian philosophy of right (Marx, 1970) was actually never intended for publication, the fundamental points then made by Marx – the mystification of the state and the twist between subject and predicate by Hegel – have stood the test of time. The Hegelian political model is fundamentally based on the dualism ‘civil society-political state’, which replaced the Hobbesian tension between nature and society (Bobbio and Bovero, 1979). Both Hegel and Marx believed in the superiority of the collective dimension over the individualism of natural law (*giusnaturalismo*), although for Hegel the higher political structure of contemporary society has a positive meaning and for Marx social superstructure has the opposite sense. The main problems identified by Marx in the Hegelian theory, namely the atomism of civil society, idealism of state rationality and the cunning of administrative flexibility actually represent some of the most evident limitations of the state nowadays. The contradictions of environmental governance, such as in the European Union, can be better appreciated with the help of Marx’s reading of the Hegelian idealisation of the state: it is the paradox of achieving all and nothing at the same time. The application of detailed science, parliamentary law-making and systematic public consultation may give the impression that the state is effectively moving towards higher levels of sustainability and ecological citizenship. However, the environmental action of the contemporary state is in effect shrouded in mystification, elitism and manipulation of public affairs for the benefit of those previously in control of the state. Despite the ingeniousness of the Hegelian model, the responsive capacity of conventional environmental regulation is also increasing showing signs of inadequacy and exhaustion.

The fundamental antinomies of flexibility and legitimacy of contemporary environmental policies need to be situated in this wider politico-ecological debate about the reform of the state. The key ontological and political question is less how the state deals with the environmental policies and strategies per se, but what its ultimate commitments are and how it works to reinforce or eliminate processes of exclusion and exploitation. As observed by Marx (1975), it is the manner of emancipation that needs to be criticised, given that the state can liberate itself without people being set free. Furthermore, the fundamental distortions of conservative democracy “must be looked for in the *nature* of the state itself” (Marx, 1975: 217). This requires sustained and radical transformations in small, specific state practices and also in wider commitments and interventions of the state. What is more, the renewal of existing state formations should happen both from the outside and from the inside of the state. The transcendence of the dualism between structure and agency of the state requires the avoidance of nature-society dualisms, which are in large part promoted and reinforced by the state itself. In the end, those multiple answers to socio-natural disputes around the state should become a main unifying catalyst that brings together sociopolitical emancipation and a just, ecologically viable, society.

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