

PIED 3510 Global Political Theory and The  
Environment

Question 7) Evaluate the claim that “hierarchical societies create the psychological conditions for the domination of the non-human world”.

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**Q7) Evaluate the claim that “hierarchical societies create the psychological conditions for the domination of the non-human world”.**

Ecoanarchism is central to an analysis of the effects hierarchical structures can have upon the non-human world; Murray Bookchin’s work - whilst sometimes inconsistent, empirically problematic, and too descriptive - is fundamental to ecoanarchism’s advancement of ecological political development and so will be central to the essay. The essay will firstly contextualise ecoanarchism’s ecological credentials with a discussion of whether it is ecocentric or anthropocentric, with a brief documentation of the rich historical anarchist tradition. Relating to this, there will be an analysis of ecoanarchists’, such as Bookchin’s, view of Karl Marx. This will be followed by a general discussion (reliant on Bookchin’s work) of the arguments common to ecoanarchism, essentially its criticism of the state for creating psychological conditions that allow for the domination of the non-human world. Furthermore, there will be an assessment of two main ecoanarchist traditions: social ecology and eco-communalism. As social ecology is associated with Bookchin’s writings, there will be an assessment of his (mainly earlier) work and its relationship to the issue of (ecological) domination. Finally, there will be a brief analysis of eco-communalism, with a consideration of Bookchin’s later work, which can be seen as an expression of eco-communalism even though Bookchin revokes his relationship with the anarchist tradition in 2002. It will be argued that both Bookchin’s earlier and later work can assist with understanding the psychological constraints constructed through hierarchy.

Eckersley (1992) argues that ecoanarchism, whilst not perfect, is the most ecocentric eco-philosophy amongst those she assessed - with eco-communalism more ecocentric than social ecology. By ecocentric, Eckersley (1992) is counter-posing

anthropocentric views of nature that see humans as the 'natural' dominators of nature, with ecocentric analyses that believe the interrelationships between humans and non-humans is central – attributing dividing lines as artificial. However, Eckersley (1992) deems Bookchin's dislike for population measures as anthropocentric. Bookchin's objection to population control has caused conflicts with the deep ecology movement, whom have been known to support phenomena such as HIV/AIDS to reduce population levels (Dryzek 2005). However, there has been a recent reconciliation between social and deep ecology, with Bookchin (1991) firmly rejecting the anthropocentric label.

Nisbet (1973) asserts that the anarchist tradition is one of the four types of ecological communities within Western thought. Ecological communities' emphasise interdependence (between humans and nature), renewal, cooperation, autonomous association, and spontaneity. Whilst heavily influenced by Marx, ecoanarchists are opposed to, rather than an extension, of Marxian analysis; capitalism, for ecoanarchists, is one aspect of a much broader problem: the problem of hierarchy (Eckersley 1992). However, Bookchin (2002) does refer to capitalisms' social relations becoming increasingly engrained on people's minds through psychological processes resulting in pessimistic actions, such as the development of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, Bookchin (1982) has a critical analysis of Marx, as he argues that contra to seeing nature as dominating humans; we should see the domination of humans by humans causing the domination of the non-human world. Regardless, many - including Bookchin - have a deterministic critique of Marx, failing to see Marx's ecological potential (Burkett 1997).

Understanding the basic ecoanarchist analysis, before assessing specific divisions, is important when considering the influence hierarchy has in regards to the domination of the non-human world. All ecoanarchists want to abolish the state. For example, Bookchin's (1982) analysis of how hierarchy arose illustrates the effects of men dominating women: as civil society expanded, women were constructed as closer to nature, i.e. 'the Other'. For Bookchin, this is central to the human domination of nature, as men's denial of women's subjectivity results in men objectifying themselves and in turn, nature. These contradictions, for Bookchin, are reified by the state, psychologically and physically, illustrating the importance for many ecoanarchists psychological conditions have regarding the human domination of nature. These psychological conditions are developed through the socialisation process, but Bookchin believes these constraints are beginning to weaken with the state's violence becoming the primal threat. However, Bookchin proclaims that the state has no limits, with its form influencing society's psychological conditions. Therefore, both the state and society need overthrowing.

Wolff (1998) argues there is no moral justification for the state, and that only anarchism can resolve the tensions between individuals' autonomy and the state's authority (through abolishing the state). He argues that unanimous direct democracy, where every person votes on every issue through unanimous voting, creates practical problems and undermines autonomy through disagreements/compromises. Therefore, majority democracy has developed to deal with these problems but has reduced autonomy even more. However, Bookchin (1995a) argues for 'majority rule' and criticises Wolff's analysis as an expression of 'lifestyle' anarchism (to be discussed).

Whilst we must not confuse domestic with international, Young (1989) refers to how international politics is defined by international anarchy, as there are numerous institutions but limited organisations. By this, he means there are rules and conventions (institutions) but few physical locations (organisations). He argues there are benefits to such an arrangement (such as a reduction in cost), providing inspiration to the potential for local/national ecoanarchist governance to replace states.

Social ecology is a specific form of ecoanarchism constructed through the work of Bookchin. Bookchin (2004) refers to how essential science has been for the development of revolutionary thought but that this has been undermined through the social order's coercion. Nevertheless, ecology has the potential to relight revolutionary thought. Bookchin (1980) describes ecology as "scientific art" (p.271), where complementary interrelations between nature and humans, diversity, spontaneity, and harmony are promoted.

Bookchin's (1982) analysis of how hierarchy emerged (briefly discussed above) is crucial for understanding the ways psychological conditions are constructed and influence the human domination of nature. He refers to organic societies, where hierarchical relations were weak, human to nature interrelationships were complementary, and (regardless of biased cultural interpretations) sex roles were equal. However, as communities developed into tribes and social power formed, civil society (men) and domestic life (women) separated (discussed above).

Bookchin argues the elder men/shamans initially thrived from hierarchy developing, as they were able to use the institutionalisation of power to construct psychological conditions of domination through socialisation, because of their fear of nature. The

shamans were replaced by priests with deities/theology replacing spirits/magic, assisting the construction of guilt as humans were blamed for natural disasters (a key psychological condition for human domination of humans/nature) (Raven 2009). Bookchin states that there are interrelated material and subjective changes central to the development of a hierarchical society. He creates the concept, epistemologies of rule, to conceptualise subjective changes to illustrate their importance in constructing psychological conditions for the domination of the non-human world by humans.

Nevertheless, Rudy (1998) provides a damning critique of Bookchin's use of anthropological data and his biological reductionist, contradictory view of hierarchy formation. For example, Bookchin only used two anthropological studies from the 1950s on mid 20<sup>th</sup> century North American tribes, which contradictorily ignores the later anthropological work into the variety of tribes - despite Bookchin's emphasis on diversity. Furthermore, Bookchin neglects evidence of ecologically sustainable hierarchical societies, as well as the importance of competition. Thus, as Eckersley (1992) asserts, it is hard to prove hierarchical structures cause ecological problems. However, Bookchin (1995a) appears to backtrack on his earlier work, referring to the problems of understanding pre-historic society.

Raven (2009) argues that Bookchin does not provide adequate assessment of the processes involved in hierarchical development and that we need a socio-cybernetic analysis of the movement from organic to hierarchical society, as this is an organic process itself. This is important, as without an understanding, how are we to intervene and remove the psychological conditions that enable the domination of nature? Arguably, Bookchin's (1995b) dialectical naturalism is an assessment of the processes (including psychological) involved in hierarchical development. Whilst

recognising the merits of instrumental reason, he believes that dialectical naturalism is an alternative to both conventional reason and deep ecology's mysticism. It relates to the construction of 'reality', which has two meanings: the 'present' is a reality where the fulfilment of potentiality has not occurred, whereas reality as 'actuality' is when a rational process is fulfilled - illustrating the importance of ethical judgments in accordance to the construction of reality.

Central to dialectical naturalism is Bookchin's theoretical development of first (non-human) and second (social/political/human) nature, where the latter has an active role in helping the former develop rationally. This is because second nature has caused considerable damage to the planet, and so instead, we need 'free nature' where there is a non-hierarchical synthesis (whilst maintaining specificities) between first and second nature with an 'ethics of complementarity', instead of domination (Bookchin 1990). This again illustrates Bookchin's emphasis upon psychological changes for a non-hierarchical ecological society to develop. However, Eckersley (1992) criticises Bookchin for being anthropocentric through constructing humans as the 'stewards' of natural/evolutionary development. However, Bookchin (1990) argues that Eckersley misrepresents his work whilst holding an ahistorical view of nature and ignoring his emphasis upon second nature restoring a harmonious (not exploitative) relationship with first nature.

Bookchin's (2004) work on revolutionary praxis and its potential to overthrow the prevalent psychological conditions in hierarchical societies that assist with the domination of the non-human world, illustrates the importance of self-liberation, contra to 'mass' liberation, within mass movements; as 'mass' liberation covers up hierarchical processes. The revolutionary movement has to be organised in

accordance to visions of a future societal organisation; essential, is the dissolution of psychological and material hierarchal constraints:

He [revolutionary member] actually sheds the internalized structure of autonomy, the long cultivated body of conditioned reflexes, and the pattern of submission sustained by guilt that tie one to the system even more effectively than any fear of police violence and juridical reprisal (p.15).

Bookchin (2004) refers to the France May-June 1968 uprising as an example of a spontaneous, self-liberation movement based on undermining the hierarchical structures and the related psychological constraints. However, hierarchical fractions within the revolution, based on Leninism, actually contained counter-revolutionary forces that undermined the uprising.

After considering social ecology's impact upon ecological thought, it is essential to consider eco-communalism – another form of ecoanarchism – as it has a lot in common with social ecology, yet places less emphasis on hierarchy. There are variations of eco-communalism. For example, Nisbet (1973) refers to Western monasticism's development in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and its commitment to purposeful non-competitive work with limited authority and a respect for nature. The Dark Ages were central to monasticism's development, with Benedict of Nursia as an ideal example. Eckersley (1992) argues that monasticism may be the holistic answer to remedy the ecological problems; however, eco-monasticism suffers from relying upon charismatic leaders. Another expression of eco-communalism is bioregionalism, which is about reconfiguring

relationships with biological areas that have suffered from a history of exploitation – this is something social ecology itself, supports (Eckersley 1992).

Bookchin's later work on communalism is a form of eco-communalism, which Bookchin acknowledges until revoking his anarchist legacy in 2002. His anarchist doubts began in the 1990s, when he criticised anarcho-syndicalism's narrow class/labour struggle focus (Bookchin 1992). Bookchin (1995a) followed this with a critique of what he calls 'lifestyle' anarchism, which privileges individual autonomy over collective freedom and how its re-emergence undermined anarchists' ability to capitalise on a weakening state. However, fearing the anarchist movement was beyond redemption, Bookchin (2002) severed his relationship with anarchism, arguing it is out of date, individualistic and ignorant to the importance of civic politics. Nevertheless, he maintained his social ecology label, distancing it from ecoanarchism/anarchism.

Instead, Bookchin (2002) argued that communalism, which relates to his work on libertarian municipalism and dialectical naturalism, expresses social ecology best. Central to this is face-to-face direct democracy within Athens polis-style assemblies (Bookchin 1994), in order to construct counter-institutions to the state (Bookchin 1986) through a redefinition of grassroots politics, as it disconnects from political parties and emphasises non-hierarchy relations. Bookchin believed it would stop the domination of nature, as the psychological and material processes responsible would be counteracted. There is more account of the global context in comparison to Bookchin's earlier work, which helps address likely problems such as a postcode lottery.

In conclusion, the essay has argued that ecoanarchism and its divisions, social ecology and eco-communalism; provide convincing evidence that hierarchical societies have *helped* (supporting a casual relationship needs much more evidence) produce the necessary psychological conditions for human domination over the non-human world. Bookchin's work is central to this, but his use of anthropological data and the problems with deciphering the processes involved in constructing these psychological conditions, undermine his contribution. However, the claims that Bookchin's analysis is anthropocentric, whilst containing elements of truth, should not detract from the value his work has for a future ecological society. Bookchin's later work on communalism shows parallels to eco-communalism, another branch of ecoanarchism, something he accepts until he unfortunately denounces his association with the anarchist tradition. However, Bookchin's criticism of 'lifestyle' anarchism is worth considering, as it threatens to undermine an invaluable tradition of political thought and praxis. Thus, it is ecologically important to utilise both Bookchin's earlier focus upon self-liberation and the need to develop new forms of consciousness, with his later concentration on political structures that can enable the alleviation of these psychological constraints through an abolition of hierarchal relations.

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