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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Savage Ecology: War and Geopolitics at the End of the World. By Jairus Victor Grove. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. 368p. \$104.95 cloth, \$28.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592720004582

— Shannon Brincat , University of the Sunshine Coast
sbrincat@usc.edu.au

As ecological crises deepen, breaching many of our planetary thresholds, and with most nations either unwilling or unable to meet these existential threats to human and all biological life, Jairus Victor Grove’s work is a timely intervention. It joins recent noteworthy books proffering philosophically rich reexaminations of the ecological dimensions of politics in the Anthropocene, such as Damian Gerber’s *The Distortion of Nature’s Image* (2019), Stefanie Fishel’s *The Microbial State* (2017), or John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark’s *The Robbery of Nature* (2020). Taking seriously the intersection of political philosophy, ecology, and geopolitics, Grove’s work joins these attempts to theorize a way out of “the end of the world”—although his is not a way out, so to speak, but a way to live *through* the current apocalypse.

Grove takes a postmodern approach to the study of ecology in global politics, penning an engrossing if brooding and pessimistic book that is itself a unique expression of this theoretical tradition in IR theory. By ecology he means an expansive relational account of the natural universe and its processes, inclusive of all inorganic and nonhuman aspects. He focuses on the “fabric of immanent relations” (p. 69) or “the interpenetrated relationality of each and every Human and nonhuman person” (p. 3) This relational thinking “accretes from empirical scrutiny” (p. 14), making Grove’s approach far more relational than typical studies of IR and especially of geopolitics. It is far more sensitive to complexity and historical analysis; as such, it is a good example of an emergent tendency in the discipline (albeit still in its infancy) that is giving greater recognition to the philosophy of internal relations, though Grove does not identify it as such. The implications of taking such an expansive account of relations are that it allows Grove to connect a broad array of phenomena from settler colonialism to ecological harms, from armed interventions to the human body, as facets of the same geopolitical whole. As he claims, using such an approach, we “might find the most interesting research agenda during a routine check at the airport” (p. 15). Grove also calls his work a part of speculative theory, in which the speculative refers to the reflections and descriptions that accompany his wanderings through the apocalypse that probe the possibilities of our future, rather than probabilities that would exceed “human control” (p. 217).

“Savage ecology” is, at its core, a concept, one that encapsulates the Euro-American sciences and practices of

geopolitics that follow from what Grove labels a martial logic, a cold logic of war, fighting, and violence—a particular instrumentalism. Martial logic is fundamentally at odds with the necessary logics of ecological survival, whether of the human collective or nature as a whole. This radical antagonism lies at the heart of Euro-American cosmology, coloring all its possibilities, and in this way Grove’s critique echoes the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* thesis. Grove is deliberate when he calls our geological period the “Eurocene” (in distinction to other conceptual labels such as the Capitalocene or Anthropocene). According to Grove, following the thought of Peter Sloterdijk, the Eurocene is the last 500-year period of geopolitics in which war has left its mark fossilized in Earth itself (see chapter 1). War deforms both the political and geological landscapes of our planet (p. 109). The Eurocene is responsible also for the “great homogenization” across the globe: the war on human and ecological difference. The entire thrust of Grove’s work, however, is to show that this is not inevitable, that we can shift within this apocalypse and act “ferally” within it. That is, although the apocalypse is “fact,” the future is yet “unwritten,” (p. 9), and Grove calls for a turn to *feritas* (“wildness”), rather than the false civility of the Eurocene (p. 56).

Savage Ecology is sweeping. There are many fascinating discussions, anecdotes, examples, and insights throughout that by themselves make the book worthy of recommendation (one discussion that I found particularly fascinating was on amphibian extinction). The book is rich with such entries, and it makes for enlightening if not grim reading. But Grove would not see this as depressing—it is, he admits, pessimistic but only as a form of “historical atheism,” one that freely admits that “the universe does not bend toward justice” (p. 25). Rather than resignation, Grove believes he offers an account of the world “as it is” (p. 27); he offers an honest realism, one could say, whose rendering is brutal only because the current predicament facing us bears the brutality of the martial logic that brought us here in the first place. Grove pleads for a “realism whose enemy” is the type of “common sense” that makes the Eurocene itself (p 16). According to Grove, only with this foregrounding of the geopolitical context can we take our predicament seriously and confront it. Here lies our resilience—or, as Grove expresses it, where we can find “solace in the real”—because “to study the world as it is means to care for it” (p. 27).

The book is divided into three parts. Part I sets up the conceptual framework, introducing the geopolitical facets of the Eurocene, war, and martial ecology. Chapter 1 contains two exemplary ideas carried throughout the book. First is the “great homogenization” of life that describes processes that imperil diversification both in the natural world and our very thought. Perhaps most frightening is the claim that global thinking—even seemingly progressive cosmopolitan aspirations—is, according to Grove, homogenized under a spatial, temporal, and epistemic governance of *one*. This is repeated in the final

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parts of the book where Grove rejects “the presumptive boundary of a common humanity” (p. 253). Second, the chapter presents the vast reach of “martial thinking”: how “war and security are the most significant financial, creative, social, cultural, technological, and political investments of almost every nation-state on Earth” (p. 21).

Chapter 2 unpacks this idea of war as the driving force of the Eurocene, examining the making of geopolitical bodies and the corporeality of war in our communities and practices; it explores how this martial logic exists hidden in plain sight within our habits, our thought, and our imaginations that are “not seemingly warlike” (p. 77). The implication is stark: the very form of life of the Eurocene is normalized as “warlike” (p. 60). The consistency of and the support for this martial logic appear almost transcendent: even replacing leaders does little to change this trajectory.

Chapter 3 then historicizes martial practices. One of the many practices that this genealogy of the Eurocene reveals is the two forms of war: wars of exhaustion (among European or Western powers) and wars of annihilation (in settler colonies). The ecological harms that accompany the latter are shown to have informed practices from the Spanish conquest of the Americas to counterinsurgencies today. Here, Grove traces the major spikes that have driven war forward, from the Napoleonic-era mass army or unrestricted submarine warfare to Machuca’s manual on counterinsurgency of 1610 (and numerous other examples). He shows how war is being waged on internal and external fronts at all times; for example, how population concentration, pacification, and the removal of American Indian populations were central to the Indian Wars and continuing to today. “War is a phylum of organizing principles,” Grove claims (p. 105). It drags along the population and everything with it; war “violently metabolizes other forms of life in its path” as well (p. 105). Thus, the concept of the “Eurocene” demarcates those forms of martial life that have emerged at the expense of other forms of life and their (lost) possibilities.

In Part II of the book, homogenization and martial logic are shown in their operation in different ecological orders. Specifically, this part explores three “microterritories” of the Eurocene and its “aspirations” for total control (p. 110). Chapter 4 looks at bombs, focusing on IEDs and unexploded ordinances; chapter 5, at “blood,” from plasma and blood banks to biopolitics and sterilization; and chapter 6, at the “brain,” which is now being brought under the domination of martial logic as the new site of “neuro-geopolitics.” Chapter 7 moves back to the theoretical engagements, although this time looking to three imagined futures of homogenization under the Eurocene: ecomodernist, Marxist, and US militarist futures. Why these are selected against potentially far stronger candidates for a possible future, especially social ecology or ecofeminism, is not stated. One tension is that each of these positions seems to share some affinities with Grove’s own

and yet are condemned. For example, Jason Moore is said to problematically fall back to the logic of “grave diggers” (that the system produces those who can overcome its contradictions; p. 199), a point that Grove’s argument seems to suggest as well. After all, if we can become feral in the apocalypse, is it not unthinkable that more emancipatory possibilities are at least on the table too? Gopal Balakrishnan, in turn, is criticized for suggesting that capitalism is at odds with social planning because, according to Grove, the geopolitics of the Eurocene is a form of global social planning (albeit one under a martial logic). Yet Balakrishnan is more critical of capitalism’s inability to create a rational society (in the sense of Marcuse), because it is not concerned with social goods/freedoms for all but private “accumulation,” “racial phantasms,” and a “nihilistic will to destruction.” This same irrationality is echoed in many of Grove’s charges, whether they be the “catastrophic floundering” (p. 24) of the American Empire or the “denial of the world” (p. 22) of IR theory itself. There are many such potentially productive similarities that could build bridges between such thinkers and various allied (though distinct) theoretical schools—perhaps this is one of the more constructive implications of Grove’s book. It highlights the grave need for a conversation between the various “critical” ecologies to cohere a collective strategy of getting out or through the Eurocene, and Grove provides a useful entry point to this dialogue.

Grove’s center of contention with these accounts is that either they are far “too optimistic,” given the “sadistic material conditions” (p. 202) of the Eurocene, or they fall to a humanism and/or homogeneous singularity (p. 9). As becomes clear in part III, Grove’s point of departure from these alternatives is that he is more focused on the apocalypse as a bifurcation point; that is, as something where “other ways of life become possible” (p. 9). Accordingly, the final chapters set out Grove’s tentative solutions: chapter 8 champions the possible emergence of freaks and feral reason and chapter 9 “the differentiation of life.” Here, the hopes of turning to wildness are outlined—how going “feral” is viewed not as a way out of but “rather a way through” our historical impasse (pp. 9, 259). Feritas remains within the Eurocene but as a possibility of “going productively off course” within this trajectory (p. 232).

One must ask this question, however: If feritas exhibits the same logic of the Eurocene, how has it remained independent of the pathologies of this era? And if feritas has remained outside this control, as untamed wildness, is it not conceivable it could be wielded as a way out of the ecocide around us? Not only does the concept seem unnecessarily constrained in its possibilities, but also, without further analysis into the various aspects of its history (which Grove sees as a set of “preconditions”), the alternative possibilities latent within the Eurocene—*the ways out* of ecocide—may be thrown out too readily as well. Here, methods of (immanent) normative critique may complement such endeavors.

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