

The Philosophy and Politics of Social Ecology

April 5-May 24, 2021 – Mondays 1 PM EST

Instructor: Chaia Heller

Course administration: social-ecology@mail.mayfirst.org



Institute for Social Ecology Online Seminar

This class offers a deep dive into the philosophy and politics of social ecology designed for both newcomers to the theory and for those well versed in Bookchin's work. Together, we'll address epistemological questions that offer a rethinking of nature and human nature that transcends racist, patriarchal, and colonial outlooks that, in turn, open the way to envision a free, democratic, and ecological society. We'll also take on a central and fraught question of social and ecological ethics. Using anti-racist and feminist perspectives, we'll consider how to ground an ethics in a dialectical and 'situated' approach to both making and evaluating knowledge claims. During the second half of the course, we'll apply social ecology's epistemological and ethical frameworks to creating a utopian and democratic political praxis. We'll address Bookchin's communalist project, exploring crucial questions including 'what is dual power?' and 'how do we bring revolutionary perspectives to our work in social and ecological movements?'

Class format

Each week will start with a short lecture/presentation by the instructor, followed by large and small group discussion. If you happen to miss a class, each lecture will be recorded and hosted on our course portal to be accessed anytime. Course readings are downloadable. Participants are expected to complete the readings in advance of each seminar. The weekly seminar lasts 1.5

hours, and the 25-50 pages of weekly readings should take an estimated 1-3 hours. There are two (optional) discussion forums to pose comments and questions between sessions.

There are no written assignments for non-credit seeking students, those who wish to earn credit through our partnership with Castleton University must complete additional work and fee requirements (write for details). The course cost is \$100, payment plans and need-based scholarships available.

Required Texts

To help defray course costs, all readings will be available as electronic files. For those who wish to purchase books, several readings will be drawn from *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Murray Bookchin) and *The Ecology of Everyday Life* (Chaia Heller).

Weekly Course Plan and Readings

April 5: Epistemology, Part I

Cultural Conceptions of Nature: Race, Gender, Colonialism, Class

Readings:

- “Rescuing Lady Nature,” from *The Ecology of Everyday Life*. Chaia Heller, Black Rose Books, 1999.
- Excerpt from *Defending the Earth*. Murray Bookchin, Dave Foreman et al. South End Press, 1990.
- *Dumping in Dixie: Race, class, and environmental quality*. R.D. Bullard. Boulder, CO: Westview. 1990. Chapter one.

April 12: Epistemology, Part II

Dialectical Naturalism: Transcending Colonial Notions of (Cultural) Evolution

Readings:

- “Toward a Philosophy of Nature,” in *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*. Black Rose Books, 1995.
- “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936.” Donna Haraway. *Social Text*, No. 11 (Winter, 1984-1985), pp. 20-64.

April 19: Ethics, Part I

Grounding Ethics in ‘Nature’ versus ‘Natural History’

Readings:

- “Freedom and Necessity in Nature,” In, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*. Murray Bookchin, Black Rose Books, 1995

April 26: Ethics, Part II

Position and Positionality: Do Our Identities Affect the Legitimacy of Truth Claims?

Readings:

- “Situated Knowledge,” In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. Donna Haraway. Routledge, 1991.
- “Questioning Ocalan’s Jewish Question.” Chaia Heller. Unpublished manuscript.
- *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin. Chapters 2 and 3. Monkeyrench Press, 1994.

May 3: Politics, Part I

What is Power, Anyway? Explorations Social, Political and Dual Power

Readings:

- “The Public and the Private Realm,” part two of *The Human Condition*. Hannah Arendt. University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- “The Meaning of Confederalism.” Murray Bookchin.
- “Dual Power in Bolivia: Movement and Government Since the Election Of 2005.” Stuart Alexander Rockefeller. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, Vol. 36, No. 3, *Power, Indigeneity, Economic Development and Politics in Contemporary Bolivia* (FALL, 2007).

May 10: Politics, Part II

Direct Democracy: How Particular Identities Inform General Political Practice

Readings:

- “History’s Corners and Peripheries: Pan African Social Ecology and Intimate Direct Democracy.” In, *Pan African Social Ecology*. Modibo Kadalie. AK Press, 2019.

May 17: Politics, Part III

Experiments in Direct Democracy: From Ancient Athens to Rojava

Readings:

- “The Communalist Project.” Murray Bookchin.
- “What is Communalism?” Murray Bookchin.
- *Guest lecture by Debbie Bookchin on ‘The Women of Rojava’*

May 24: Politics, Part IV

Illustrative Opposition: The Revolutionary Potential of Social Movements

Readings:

- “Illustrative Opposition,” in *Ecology of Everyday Life*. Chaia Heller, Black Rose Books, 1999.