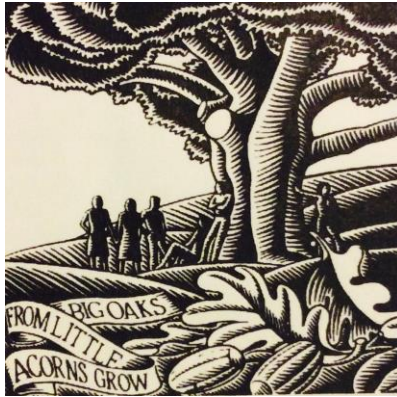


Ecology, Democracy, Utopia: An Introduction to Social Ecology



Institute for Social Ecology Online Seminar

Faculty: Dan Chodorkoff, Chaia Heller, Brian Tokar, Brooke Lehman, Peter Staudenmaier, Grace Gershuny, Blair Taylor

Course facilitator: Blair Taylor social-ecology@mail.mayfirst.org

Course Summary

The course introduces students to Social Ecology – an interdisciplinary body of ideas that explores the relationship between social and ecological problems from a transformative political perspective. We will explore a wide range of interrelated themes including the emergence of hierarchy and domination in society, the nature of democracy and state, capitalism and inequality, global power relations, technology and sustainable design, food politics, movement history and political strategy. Students will learn the foundations of Social Ecology and apply these insights to a variety of contemporary political and ecological problems, sharpening their understanding of the world while developing visionary solutions to change it. The eight units cover:

- *What is Social Ecology?*
- *The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*
- *Understanding Nature*
- *Capitalism, Critique, Alternatives*
- *Technology, Agriculture, and Society*
- *Politics Beyond the State: Direct Democracy & Popular Assemblies*
- *Getting from Here to There: Social Movements and Community Organizing*
- *Reconstructive Vision: Reclaiming Utopia*

Course Format and Expectations

The course combines video lectures by ISE faculty, a weekly online seminar, readings, and online discussion forums. Each week, participants watch a video lecture and read assigned texts, then meet online via Zoom to discuss them with faculty and other students

during the weekly seminar. There are also online forums where the conversation can be continued between sessions.

The video lectures and texts are hosted on our PowerSchool/Haiku learning portal and can be accessed anytime; the readings are downloadable. Participants are expected to watch the video lectures and complete the readings in advance of each seminar. The weekly video lectures range from 1-1.5 hours long, the weekly video seminar lasts 1.5 hours, and the 25-50 pages of weekly readings should take an estimated 1-3 hours. There are no written assignments or grades.

Through our partnership with Goddard College, students who enroll in their low-residency BA program can earn college credit for the course; some students from other institutions have been able to take the course for credit via their home university as an independent study. All participants receive a certificate of course completion.

LECTURES & READINGS BY UNIT

Unit 1: What is Social Ecology?

Guest Lecturer: Dan Chodorkoff

Dan Chodorkoff. "Social Ecology: an Ecological Humanism." *The Anthropology of Utopia*. (New Compass: 2014).

Murray Bookchin. "What is Social Ecology?" *Social Ecology and Communalism*, (AK Press 2007).

Unit 2: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy

Guest Lecturer: Brian Tokar

Murray Bookchin. "The Legacy of Domination," pp 75-98, and "Organic Society" pp 58-74 of *The Murray Bookchin Reader* (Black Rose: 1999).

Vandana Shiva. "Decolonizing the North," *Ecofeminism* (Zed 2014).

Unit 3: What is Nature?

Guest Lecturer: Chaia Heller

Chaia Heller. "Rescuing Lady Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic," Chapter One, *The Ecology of Everyday Life* (Black Rose: 1999).

Murray Bookchin. "Nature First and Second." pp 37-57 of *The Murray Bookchin Reader*.

Unit 4: Capitalism, Critique, Alternatives

Guest Lecturer: Peter Staudenmaier

Peter Staudenmaier. "[What is Capitalism?](#)" ISE website.

Murray Bookchin. "Market versus moral economy." *The Modern Crisis* (Black Rose: 1986) pp. 77-98.

Howie Hawkins. "Community Control, Worker's Control and the Cooperative Commonwealth." *Society and Nature* 3, 1993.

Blair Taylor. "[Seven Left Myths about Capitalism.](#)" ISE website. 2012

(Video) [Fully Automated Luxury Communism](#)

Unit 5: Technology, Agriculture, and Society

Guest Lecturer: Grace Gershuny

Murray Bookchin. "The Social Matrix of Technology," "Utopia, not Futurism," and "Radical Agriculture."

Grace Gershuny. *Organic Revolutionary*. pp 12-14. (Joes Brook Press 2016).

Frances Moore Lappé. "The Food Movement: Its Power and Possibilities." *The Nation* (October 3, 2011).

Unit 6: Politics and the State – Popular Assemblies and Direct Democracy

Guest Lecturer: Blair Taylor

Murray Bookchin. "The Communalist Project" Chapter 1, *The Next Revolution*.

- "Libertarian Municipalism: A Politics of Direct Democracy." Chapter 5, *The Next Revolution* (Verso: 2016).

- "The Meaning of Confederalism," Chapter 4, *The Next Revolution*.

(Video) Bookchin on "The Forms of Freedom," 1985.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqPwr-cVz_M

Unit 7: Getting from Here to There – Social Movements, Community Organizing, Revolutionary Politics

Guest Lecturer: Brooke Lehman

Chaia Heller. "Illustrative Opposition" in *The Ecology of Everyday Life* (Black Rose: 1999)

Brian Tokar. "[On Bookchin's Social Ecology and its Contribution to Social Movements.](#)" ISE website.

Murray Bookchin. "The Future of the Left," Chapter 9 *The Next Revolution* (Verso: 2016).

Unit 8: Reconstructive Vision – Reclaiming Utopia

Guest Lecturer: Dan Chodorkoff

Martin Buber. *Paths in Utopia*, (1949) pp. 1-15.

Dan Chodorkoff. “The Utopian Impulse,” *The Anthropology of Utopia*, (New Compass: 2014) pp. 121-144).

Brian Tokar. “On Utopian Aspirations in the Climate Movement,” *Toward Climate Justice*, (New Compass: 2010) pp. 117-136).

Blair Taylor. “[To Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible: Toward a Visionary Left](#).” *Tikkun*, 2014.