The Philosophy and Politics of Social Ecology
The Institute for Social Ecology
Chaia Heller, January, 2024

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 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

Please complete course readings and watch the video lecture *before* logging into each Zoom session. Chaia will begin class discussion with a brief overview of the topics to be covered for that day's class to be followed by either large or small group discussion. The video lectures and texts are hosted on our course portal and can be accessed anytime; the readings are downloadable. As the weekly video lectures range from 1-1.5 hours long, you might consider breaking them into two viewing sessions. The 25-50 pages of weekly readings should take an

estimated 1-3 hours depending on your reading speed. There are two (optional) discussion forums to pose comments and questions between sessions. For people who aren't taking the class for college credit, there are no written assignments or grades.

Required/Suggested 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).

Part I: Epistemology

Week 1: Cultural Conceptions of Nature: Race, Gender, Colonialism, Class

- "Rescuing Lady Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic," Chapter One, *The Ecology of Everyday Life* (Black Rose: 1999) by Chaia Heller.
- 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.
- "The Man Who Was Caged in a Zoo." Pamela Newkirk. *The Guardian*, 2015.
- VIDEO: Climate Change's White Supremacy Problem

Week 2: Dialectical Naturalism: Transcending Colonial Notions of (Cultural) Evolution

- Murray Bookchin, "Freedom and Necessity in Nature," *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.

Part II: Ethics

Week 3: Grounding Ethics in 'Nature' versus 'Natural History'

- Murray Bookchin, "Thinking Ecologically: A Dialectical Approach," *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*. Black Rose Books, 1995.

Week 4: Position and Positionality: Do Our Identities Affect the Legitimacy of Truth Claims?

- "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. Donna Haraway. Routledge, 1991.
- Chaia Heller, "Questioning Ocalan's Jewish Question." *Harbinger: a Journal of Social Ecology*.
- Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin. *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, Chapters 2 and 3. Monkeywrench Press, 1994.

Part III: Politics

Week 5: What Is Power, Anyway?: Explorations of Social, Political, and Dual Power

- Hannah Arendt, “The Public and the Private Realm,” part two of *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Murray Bookchin, “The Meaning of Confederalism,” *The Next Revolution*.
- Stuart Alexander Rockefeller. “Dual Power in Bolivia: Movement and Government Since the Election Of 2005.” *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).

Week 6: Direct Democracy: How Particular Identities Inform General Political Practice

- “History’s Corners and Peripheries: Pan African Social Ecology and Intimate Direct Democracy.” In, *Pan African Social Ecology*. Modibo Kadalie. AK Press, 2019.
- VIDEO: 21st Century Socialism: Nuilifer Koc discusses the history of socialism and the PKK.

Week 7: Experiments in Direct Democracy: From Ancient Athens to Rojava

- Murray Bookchin. “The Communalist Project,” *The Next Revolution*.
- Murray Bookchin. “What is Communalism?: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism.”
- Debbie Bookchin, “How My Father’s Ideas Helped the Kurds Create a New Democracy.”
- Dilar Dirik. “Don’t Know Us Because of Our Guns, but Because of Our Ideas.”
- Video: Black Socialists in America x Kongra Star in Conversation about Rojava.
- Meredith Tax, “Trump’s Betrayal of Rojava.”

Week 8: Illustrative Opposition: The Revolutionary Potential of Social Movements

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