

Ecology, Democracy, Utopia: Introduction to Social Ecology

The course introduces students to Social Ecology – an interdisciplinary body of ideas that explores the relationship between social and ecological problems. Social Ecology addresses a set of diverse yet 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, and movements for social change. 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 ten units explore:

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

This course explores the intersection of nature, society, politics and power, examining the relationship between social and ecological problems. It addresses a set of diverse yet interrelated themes in political ecology including the nature of nature; different forms of ecological analysis and critique; how social domination relates to the domination of non-human nature; climate change and the anthropocene; technology, agriculture and sustainable design; food politics; ecology vis-à-vis utopia and dystopia; and current and historical movements for social-ecological change. We will consider how ideas about nature shape and reproduce a variety of social relations institutionalized by the state, capitalism, gender regimes, racialized inequality, sexuality, and global power relations. Students will critically engage with a variety of different theoretical perspectives – social ecology, deep ecology, ecofeminism, degrowth, eco-Marxism, accelerationism – to evaluate their analytical strengths and weaknesses and how their particular understanding of ecological problems lead to divergent solutions. We will apply these insights to a variety of contemporary political and ecological problems, sharpening our understanding of the world while developing visionary solutions to change, and perhaps save it.

WEEKLY LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

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).

2. *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*.

3. *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).

David Graeber and David Wengrow. "How to Change the Course of Human History."

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

4. *Feminism(s), Ecofeminism(s), and Social Ecology – Guest Lecturer: Chaia Heller*

Chaia Heller. "Reflections on the Ecofeminist Desire for Nature," Chapter Two, *The Ecology of Everyday Life* (Black Rose: 1999).

Greta Gaard. "Ecofeminism Now" (video).

5. *Race and the Colonial World – Guest Lecturer: Kali Akuno*

Samir Amin. Selection from *Eurocentrism* (Monthly Review: 1989).

Victor Ray. "The Social Construction of Race", Chapter One, *On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters and Why You Should Care* (Random House: 2022).

6. *Capitalism, Critique, Alternatives – Guest Lecturer: Peter Staudenmaier/Blair Taylor*

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

7. *Agriculture, Climate, and Ecology – 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).

8. *Politics and the State: Popular Assemblies and Direct Democracy – Guest Lecturer: Mason Herson-Hord*

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

Kali Akuno. "People's Assembly Overview: The Jackson People's Assembly Model." Chapter 5, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi* (Daraja Press: 2017).

Project South. *The People's Movement Assembly Organizing Handbook*. (Video) Bookchin on "The Forms of Freedom," 1985.

9. *Getting from Here to There – Social Movements, Community Organizing, Revolutionary Politics – Guest Lecturer: Brooke Lehman*

Symbiosis Research Collective. "Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid: Toward Dual Power and Beyond". *Next System Project*: 2017.

Tim Horras. "Base-Building: Activist Networking or Organizing the Unorganized?" *Regeneration Magazine*.

Detroit Build and Fight Strategy document (unpublished).

10. *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.