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


2. What is Nature? Guest Lecturer: Chaia Heller


3. The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy – Guest Lecturer: Brian Tokar


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

Greta Gaard. “Ecofeminism Now” (video).

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


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

Peter Staudenmaier. “What is Capitalism?” ISE website.
Blair Taylor. “Seven Left Myths about Capitalism.” ISE website. 2012

7. Agriculture, Climate, and Ecology – Guest Lecturer: Grace Gershuny

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

Project South. *The People’s Movement Assembly Organizing Handbook*.

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

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

10. Reconstructive Vision: Reclaiming Utopia – Guest Lecturer: Dan Chodorkoff