



Environmental Ethics

A Marxist-Feminist Approach to Sustainability

55-01.201.409, Hauptseminar Fall 2019
Tuesday 12:15-13:45, Raum Ü35 - 03080

This course explores Environmental Ethics through a Marxist-feminist lens, analyzing the relationship between global capitalism and our current ecological crisis. Our readings will orient us in contemporary debates in Marxist political theory, environmental ethics, and eco-feminism.

The dominant models for sustainability demand that we reduce climate pollution by cutting back on fossil fuel emissions. This approach to ecology employs a similar logic to an economic model based on austerity, which responds to deficit with spending cuts. Recent initiatives for sustainability—notably the Green New Deal as it is being developed in the U.S. and Europe—add a positive program to the demand to reduce practices that have detrimental effects for the environment. By introducing alternative energy sources and new green jobs, for example, these deals seek to transform our social and economic structures with the aim of ecological recovery.

Some political theorists argue that various versions of the Green New Deal still do not go far enough. By “greenwashing” capitalism, these programs fail to recognize the source of our ecological crisis. They argue that in order to save planet earth a deeper ecological approach is needed, one that radically reconceives relationships of power. We will consider these relationships on a number of levels: relationships between socio-economic groups, between nations, between different species, and between the human and more-than-human world.

Drawing on Marxist and feminist perspectives, this course tests the hypothesis that our environmental crisis stems from a failure to grasp our collective existence. A lack of an understanding concerning the interconnectivity of all life results in relationships built on competition. The natural world becomes reduced to a resource to sustain our individual existences. We fear that if we don’t claim this resource for ourselves and “our people,” others will steal away our right to a prosperous future. As these “resources for sustaining the self” become threatened, social and political relationships become fueled with fear and discrimination and economic disparity widens. We will question how a perspective of our collective existence could give birth to a new ethical framework that generates global action to recover the earth as something more than a resource to be used (and used up) for our individual ends.

Many of us imagine that we can invest in the individual ends of our families, communities, or nations while neglecting other lives and other life forms that don’t appear to be directly related to us. We believe that our ethical responsibility is first and foremost to our own. And so we build walls, underground bunkers, and plan new colonies on Mars—imagining that the vulnerability of others won’t touch us. We would save ourselves before saving our planet—as if we don’t share the same fate. This course drives towards developing a new ethics that fights to sustain the common good of our collective existence.



READINGS

Global Capitalism & the Environmental Crisis

Ashley Dawson. *Extinction: A Radical History*. (New York: OR Books, 2016).

Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*. (London: Allen Lane, 2014).

Bruno Latour. *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. (Polity Press, 2018).

Eco-Marxism

Karl Marx. Selections from *Capital I*.

John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett: *Marx and the Earth* (Chicago: Haymarket 2017).

Carolyn Merchant. "Social Ecology." *Radical Ecology: In Search for a Livable World*. (London: Routledge, 2005), 139-164.

Eco-Feminism

Kate Soper. *What is Nature?: Culture, Politics, and the Non-Human*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

Carolyn Merchant. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1990).

Carolyn Merchant. "Ecofeminism." *Radical Ecology: In Search for a Livable World*. (London: Routledge, 2005) 193-222.

Laura Pulido, Tianna Bruno, Cristina Faiver-Serna & Cassandra Galentine. "Environmental Deregulation, Spectacular Racism, and White Nationalism in the Trump Era." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*. 2019. DOI: 10.1080/24694452.2018.1549473

Sustaining the Common Good of Our Collective Existence

William E. Connolly. *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*. (London: Duke, 2017).

Donna Haraway. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (London: Duke University, 2016).

Tim Morten. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. (New York: Columbia, 2016).



Canceled Classes: October 29, November 5, January 7 (to be rescheduled)

Preparation and Attendance

Regular attendance and active participation are a requirement of this course. Lively class discussion and debate will be a critical component of our time together. In addition to our weekly readings, students will be expected to stay informed about current international events at the intersection of politics and the environmental crisis by drawing on different kinds of news sources.

PDFs of many of our readings will be made available on Stine. You will be required to bring hard or electronic copies of the readings with you to class. I expect you to read the text, mark your copy, take notes, and prepare thoughtful questions and comments for class discussion.

Final Paper

Final paper:
6,000-words, English or German, double-space, Times New Roman, 12 font, 2,54 cm margins, include 100 word abstract, Chicago citation style (further details will be discussed in class).