

ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL THEORY

STSS 6300/4965

Spring 2007 Tu 4:00-7:00pm

Sage Lab 5711

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Course Objectives

Environmental problems are essentially social, economic and political problems. The technical and scientific manifestations of problems like soil erosion or acid rain are but symptoms of problems rooted in human and institutional behavior governed by the stuff of the social sciences: economic systems, ideologies, social norms, values, laws, politics and policies. Great strides have been made toward identifying, understanding, and (to a considerably lesser extent) coping with or resolving environmental problems during the twentieth century. Paradoxically, the same scientific and technological worldviews and techniques that allow us to identify environmental problems are also major generators of them. But science and technology do not operate in a vacuum. They are socially constructed systems of social relations and artifacts, methods and mindsets. Science and technology are social constituents and constitutive of society. Power and ideology, class and race, gender and culture, must all be taken into account, and mobilized as conceptual tools, when trying to understand the environmental implications of science and technology. Our focus this semester is on mobilizing concepts and approaches that we can use to address environmental problems.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

We meet in seminar once per week, on tuesday evenings. We have weekly, common readings around which we focus our discussion. Each class meeting begins with an *evaluative summary of the assigned readings by a seminar participant and then turns to pursuit of a set of questions sparked by the reading and critique guided by the overarching course questions. Although particular students will summarize the readings and lead the discussions each student should have prepared notes and questions on the assigned reading in advance of the seminar meeting which will be collected weekly. A minimum of 8 such note-sets are required.

* this evaluation summary replaces notes for that week and is worth 20% of the grade (see below).

You will also write a research paper that draws on, advances and critiques contemporary social or political theory to analyze some important environmental question or problem. Paper topics must be chosen and cleared with me early in the semester. You present a polished version of your paper one of the last days of class. Presentations should be accompanied by typed outlines to hand-out to fellow seminar participants. Twenty percent of your course grade derives from notes prepared for class, twenty percent from a presentation on an assigned reading fifty percent from the paper, and ten percent from the final presentation on your course paper.

Required Texts

Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995).

David Goldblatt, *Social Theory and the Environment* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996)

John A. Hannigan, *Environmental Sociology: A Social Constructionist Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

David Macauley, ed., *Minding Nature: The Philosophers of Ecology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996).

Raymond Murphy, *Rationality & Nature: A Sociological Inquiry into a Changing Relationship* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels Against the Future* (Cambridge, Perseus Publishing, 1996)

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Jan 16 Introduction: Social Theory, STS, and the Environment

Jan 23 Rationalization and its Alternatives

Murphy, chaps. 1-5

Jan. 30 The Sociology of Environmental Degradation and beyond

Murphy, chaps. 6-10

Feb 6 Media, Science, Risk , Biodiversity and the emergence model

Hannigan chaps. 6-10

Feb. 13 From Hobbes to Bloch

Macauley, Introduction-chap. 6

Feb 20 Jonas to Bookchin

Macauley, chaps. 7-13

Feb 27 Giddens and Gorz

Goldblatt, Introduction-chap. 3

Mar. 6 Spring Break

Mar 13 Habermas and Beck

Goldblatt, chap. 4- Conclusion

Mar 20 Beck's "Dead Ends"

Beck, Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk, chaps. 1-3

Mar 27 Beck's "Antidotes"

Beck, Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk, chaps. 4-7

Apr 3 The Luddites

Sale, chap. 1-5

Apr 10 Ludites and Lessons

Sale, chaps. 6-10

Apr 17

Presentations

Apr 24

Presentations

May 1

Presentations