

A Brief Introduction to Social Ecology

Or: I googled Murray Bookchin so you don't have to

radicle

Heart of the Valley DSA



Murray Bookchin

- Born in Brooklyn 1921
- Young Communist League
- Socialist Workers Party - NJ
- United Electrical Workers
- 1958 - Anarchism
 - “Toil and Drudgery”
 - Post Scarcity
- 1962 - *Our Synthetic Environment*
 - Lewis Herber
- 1999 - Communalism
- Dies in Burlington 2006

Outline

- Bookchin's critique of mainstream environmentalism
- The theory of social ecology
- The ecological society

Deep Lore: Bernie Sanders tells the story of the first time he won an election, that he did so by just 10 votes. Bookchin would say he could name those ten people, because they were anarchists he persuaded to vote for Bernie. He later disavowed Bernie.



Critique of mainstream environmentalism

“Species-centered,
asocial view[s] of
ecological problems
and their sources”



Critique of mainstream environmentalism

- Liberal ecomodernism
 - Liberatory vs. oppressive technology
- Anti human, anti-civ, anti-technology environmentalism
 - False dichotomy: “Corrupt” Society vs. “Pure” Nature
 - “Civilization” and “Society” as flattening terms - Disguise differences within and between societies
 - “...prevents us from examining the highly complex differences and divisions within society so necessary to define our problems and their solutions.”

Social Ecology - First & Second Nature

- Human social evolution is derived from natural evolution
 - “...we bring into being within the realm of Nature, a second nature for ourselves.” - Cicero
- Biological basis for human civilization
 - Parent-child relationships
 - Human babies are useless
 - Society-child relationships
 - Human beings are created both biologically and sociologically

Social Ecology

Consequences of extended developmental process:

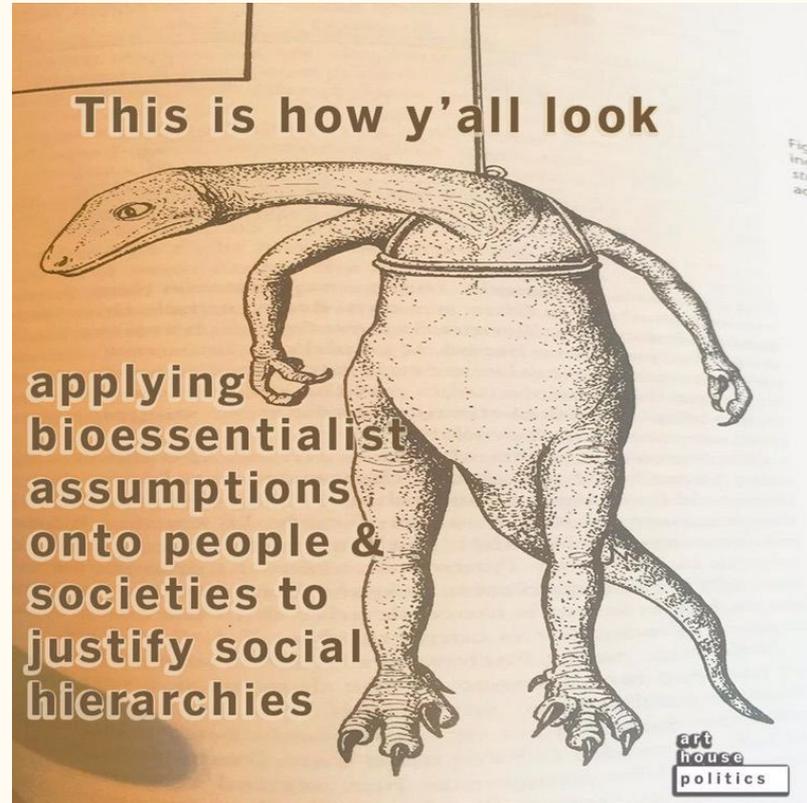
- 1) Predisposition for interdependence and mutual aid
 - “Independence, not to mention competition, would have seemed utterly alien, if not bizzare, to a creature reared over many years in a largely dependent condition.”

- 2) Interdependence assumes institutionalized, structured form
 - This is the “Second Nature” that differentiates human society from non-human social structures
 - Failure to understand this can lead to “naturalization” of domination and hierarchy



Social Ecology

- Do tall Douglas Firs “dominate” shorter ones?
- Are Sequoia trees “higher up the hierarchy” than oaks?
- Do rocks “reproduce”?



Social Ecology

“We risk the possibility of totally misunderstanding the very meaning of terms like ‘hierarchy’... We tend, in effect, to confuse the strictly institutional creations of human will... with community life in its most fixed forms, as though we were dealing with inherent, seemingly unalterable, features of society rather than fabricated structures which can be modified, improved, worsened - or simply abandoned.”

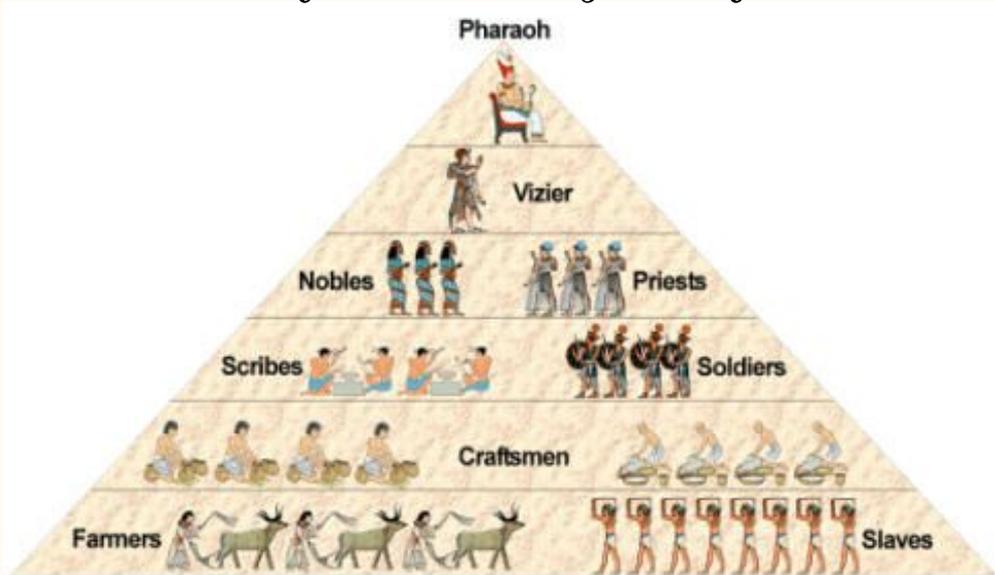
Social Ecology

- Focus not on the symptoms but the causes
- **All ecological problems arise from social problems**
 - Hierarchy
 - Domination
- That is: our ecological problems stem from social structures and institutions *that can be changed!* NOT a result of some ephemeral “human nature” that renders our species uniquely unable to coexist with the biosphere.

How did we get where we're at?

The myth of a “stingy” or dominate nature

- Used by elites to justify domination



How did we get where we're at?



"The assumption that what currently exists must necessarily exist is the acid that corrodes all visionary thinking."

- Murray Bookchin

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- Used to justify “submission” of humans to nature or “natural law”

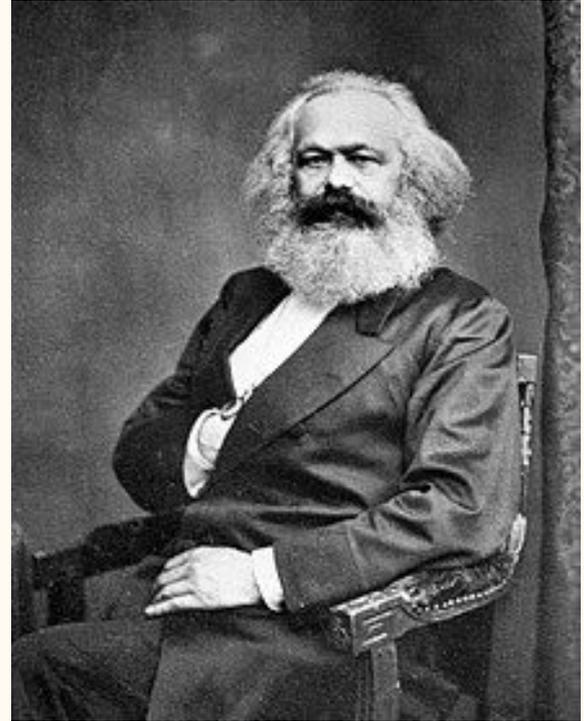


Again, two sides of the same coin - nature is a “taskmaster” that must be dominated or obeyed

How did we get where we're at?

The myth of a “stingy” or dominate nature

- Used by elites to justify domination
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- Critique of Historical Materialism



Social Ecology and Nature

- Post scarcity through technological innovation
- Nature as *a process* trending toward greater fecundity and creativity
- Simple adaptation gives way to freedom of choice as a driver of natural evolution
- Humanity and the rest of nature can work in synchrony to continue to enhance these latent potentials in nature
 - Dialectical Naturalism
- Stifled by hierarchy and domination

The Ecological Society

- Characteristics of non-hierarchical, ecologically-oriented societies:
 - Interdependence/Mutual Aid
 - Usufruct (“free use”)
 - Unity-in-diversity
 - Complementarity/Symbiosis (working *with* the natural world to promote diversity and fecundity)
 - The Irreducible minimum (Universal Basic Outcome)

Summary - Social Ecology in 3 bullet points

- Human beings possess a second, social, nature. Derived from first, or biological nature.
- Social distortions, such as hierarchy and domination, are the root of ecological problems.
- Human beings are not doomed to dominate or be dominated by nature, but can work in symbiosis with nature to design ecological societies that are non-hierarchical, post scarcity and which promote fecundity and diversity in nature.

Thank you

Further reading:

- *Society and Ecology* - <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-society-and-ecology>
- Institute for Social Ecology - <http://social-ecology.org/wp/>
- *The Third Revolution & Post Scarcity Anarchism*
 - Contact me afterwards for ebooks