

Nov 8th, 3:30 PM

Encounters with Climate Change: How SDG 13 Can Move from Awareness to Action

Rebecca C. Potter

University of Dayton, rpotter1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/human_rights

 Part of the [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), [Environmental Education Commons](#), [Environmental Health and Protection Commons](#), [Environmental Law Commons](#), and the [Natural Resources Management and Policy Commons](#)

Potter, Rebecca C., "Encounters with Climate Change: How SDG 13 Can Move from Awareness to Action" (2017). *The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy*. 3.

http://ecommons.udayton.edu/human_rights/2017/roundtableinstitutional/3

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Human Rights Center at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlange1@udayton.edu.

The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2017 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Nov. 8-10, 2017, Dayton, Ohio

For the archive of the conference, see http://ecommons.udayton.edu/human_rights/2017/

Research Panel: Roundtable – Building Institutional Strength to Address Climate Change: Connecting Sustainability and Human Rights

Presenter: Rebecca C. Potter, University of Dayton

Title: Encounters with Climate Change: How SDG 13 Can Move from Awareness to Action

Abstract:

In a well-known passage from his book *I and Thou*, Martin Buber relates his encounter with a tree: “I contemplate a tree,” he writes, and then lists the various ways he could perceive the tree, as an artist or biologist, as someone interested in the trees parts and construction or interested in its function as a living system. But in all cases, Buber observes, “the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.”

Yet sometimes, “if will and grace are conjoined,” Buber describes being drawn into a relation with the tree wherein the tree “ceases to be an It.” The relation is reciprocal—one that demands Buber not to view the tree through the lens of his own understanding, but rather to acknowledge the tree’s material autonomy; it is a moment of communal exchange.

This paper teases out two key aspects of Buber’s encounter with a tree, aspects that characterize other famous encounters in environmental ethics, such as Aldo Leopold’s encounter with a wolf in “Thinking Like a Mountain” or Val Plumwood’s encounter with an alligator in “Being Prey.” First, these encounters all express that moment of “relation” as an erasure of subject/object dichotomies within the moment of this communal exchange. Second, the encounter demands a kind of awareness that is in itself active, leading to further social action.

By then considering narratives of climate change, either direct or mediated through dramatizations, I ask the question, what encounters will be the most effective in generating an active response that extends beyond awareness? In other words, when does encountering climate change lead to social action? I conclude by considering how such encounters do indeed foster the social practice of human rights.

About the presenter:

Rebecca Potter, PhD, is an associate professor in the University of Dayton Department of English and a director of sustainability studies. She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Davis, and a doctorate from Brandeis University. She was a recent visiting fellow at the Rachel Carson Center for the Environmental Humanities in Munich, Germany, and her current project, “The Cassandra Effect,” uses a narrative approach to understand the public response to the issue of climate change. Drawing upon familiar stories such as Shakespeare's Hamlet, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, and the tale of Cassandra from Greek mythology, she compares narratives of doubt, uncertainty, risk, skepticism, and denial to the

challenges in moving social concern to social and political actions that address climate change and its impacts. She lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio.