

Review: Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology

By William Ophuls

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

DeKalb, Illinois, USA

Ophuls, William. *Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011. xiv, 256pp. ISBN: 9780262015905, US \$27.95, cloth.

Plato's Revenge is an attempt to rethink how future societies might go about building a culturally and spiritually rich culture by reconciling with Nature and foregoing our materialistic excesses. Author Ophuls creates a strong case of how we became misguided, why it is necessary to correct this, and what it would take to get there. Throughout the text, three Greek concepts are employed: *therapeia*, a path toward wisdom and virtue, *paideia*, a vision of workable and human politics, and *politeia*, a realization of the above two. The Gaian metaphor, an ecological hypothesis that views Earth like a giant cell, a living planet, and a self-organizing system, is also used.

Modern man is viewed as a waster and consumer of Earth's ecological capital. We are poor stewards and live under the illusions of material abundance and mastery of nature. While Ophuls sees a moral depravity in how we conduct ourselves, he does provide us with a foundation to rethink our civilization with the aim of making it more sane and humane. Presented is a new ethos, a radical transformation of our way of thinking. If civilization is to survive, "...it must be inspired to be a new ideal that renounces endless material acquisition and make a virtue out of the necessity of living within our ecological means" (p.167). We need to move beyond sustainability and focus on a need for a more Platonic notion of justice, that is, "...a polity in which individuals fulfill social roles rather than aggrandize private interests" (p.42).

In creating a reality that civilization should be grounded on ecological, physical, and psychological reality, Ophuls draws on the principles articulated by classical philosophers, such as, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Jefferson, Thoreau, and Jung, as well as modern day ideology of Jacques Ellul, Theodore Roszak, and others. The book is not a researched investigation, but rather an effort to extract philosophical meaning and political guidance from ecology, physics, and psychology. From these extractions, a moral code is derived that would align natural law with Nature. Nature would instruct us in how to live.

Plato's Revenge is a follow up to Ophuls' *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity* (1977) and *Requiem for Modern Politics* (1997) with new material added. Ophuls admits that his "vision of politics of consciousness is not the only possible outcome," and that it would take "exceptional vision, enormous courage, and extraordinary 'wit'" (p.208) to create the foundation for a smaller, simpler and humbler civilization. Highly recommended for public, private and personal library collections with an interest in ecology and philosophy and/or political science and environmental policy. The book is meant for both academic and lay readers. The concluding sections include notes, sources used, and an index.

Byron Anderson <beau804@yahoo.com>, retired from Northern Illinois University Libraries, DeKalb, IL 60115, USA.

Electronic Green Journal, Issue 33, Spring 2012, ISSN: 1076-7975