

shared political life appear to be inevitable or even expressions of our virtues. In this regard, reading *Eco-Republic* is an exercise in political thinking that leaves us understanding both Plato and the world around us more fully than we did before. Conversely, reading *Plato's Revenge* leaves me wondering just why Ophuls is so convinced that Plato would sympathize with modern eco-mystics and how he can be so sure that he has provided the definitive and unarguable response to the challenge of ecological scarcity when those challenges nevertheless persist.

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CLIMBING MOUNT MORIAH

Wade Sikorski: *Sacrificial Rituals*. (Private Publication, 2011. Pp. 334.)

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Wade Sikorski, a native of Montana, is a political scientist by education and a rancher by trade who has dedicated himself to the protection of our natural environment. In his book *Sacrificial Rituals*, he tells the dramatic story of how the small town of Baker, Montana, where he grew up and has lived most of his life, faces the pressure of probusiness, antienvironmental forces and comes perilously close to moral self-immolation in its failed efforts to resolve civilly its dreadful predicament. Sikorski depicts the dilemma in biblical terms as it should be.

The book chronicles the events surrounding the arrival of Ross Electric Co. in the small Montana community. After having been compelled by authorities in Washington State and other communities in Montana to cease operations because of its numerous violations of environmental laws, the company moved to Sikorski's southeastern Montana community to continue operations. Ross Electric, a now defunct incineration firm, eventually went bankrupt as a result of several major lawsuits. However, as pernicious an influence as Ross Electric has on the people in the town of Baker, ultimately the drama unfolding before us entails the collapse of the community itself. As is so often said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." In fact, though, this book may very well persuade you that the real situation is far more sinister than that.

The book begins quite literarily with an epithetic reminder of the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac. Caravaggio's "Sacrifice of Isaac" is on the cover of the book, and the first page of the book gives us an account of the Bible story. The very title of the book—"sacrificial rituals"—echoes the startling image of

Caravaggio's painting of a father killing his son. In the first chapter Sikorski goes on to tell other incidents of similar "sacrifices," of how for the supposed preservation of the community we destroy others: "however much we deny it, we sacrifice the lives of others without their knowledge or consent to benefit our own" (17).

Environmentalism, the central concern of this book, is center stage these days. We are all familiar with the dilemma. If you compel the mills to stop polluting the air, you will put them out of business and the community will lose jobs and things will deteriorate. But if you don't ensure clean air, children will die of asthma or emphysema and the elderly will suffer respiratory diseases. There's your sacrificial ritual. There is of course no easy solution. So they say. But as the book painfully dramatizes, the "They Say" folks are not to be believed. That is the real tragedy of the near demise of little Baker, Montana. The chief villain Ross Electric flitted from hither to yon polluting the environment and when caught they paid their fines and moved on. They are not the community and they never were and they don't want to be. The public officials walk the tightrope of duplicitous public service, even to the extent of attacking citizens, as in the case of the city official who assaulted Wade Sikorski. After all they have their jobs to protect. "Rock no boats, back no losers." And finally then there is the fringe element that threatens people and terrorizes them, as they did the city librarian who was trying to help the community stay informed, because they have their own interests to protect.

In the meantime Sikorski tells another more tragic story. It is an account not about the faceless special interests that care nothing for the people or their community but the story of the face-to-face confrontation of neighbor against neighbor. This is the tragedy not only of Baker, Montana, or even of the environment, it is the tragedy of all America, the tragedy of good people doing bad. Power has corrupted not only the powerful but it has corrupted everyone.

The constant throughout the book, alongside the brutal disregard of the people of power for the people without, is the sad fact that people had stopped caring for one another. Sikorski constantly questions this. He contemplates the possible causes for why our neighbor becomes the enemy. One explanation he repeatedly returns to is gossip. "I blame gossip," he says (284). "Yet while gossip creates a community, it also destroys it" (38). The sniping, the underhandedness, and the lies compound themselves into heartless betrayals that thoughtlessly shatter any idea of fellow-feeling.

Sacrificial Rituals is dedicated to Gene Huntley, a highly respected lawyer of the Baker area. Huntley best epitomizes the enigmatic fate of a community that forgot itself in a fury of fear and hate. His death in a mysterious plane crash haunts Sikorski's book. Was it an accident or was it a deliberate act of murder? The question captures the terror of the sordid details of Baker, Montana's dubious recent history. We have to ask ourselves, Could such things happen? Wade Sikorski's telling of the events leaves little doubt that

everywhere in this country today powerful special interests are poisoning our environment, and for the most part getting away with it, and killing our children because they can.

Wade Sikorski has written several other books. I suspect, though, that the others did not require the scope or discipline of emotions that *Sacrificial Rituals* demanded. It is a personal book. He meditates on the wrongs that were done, citing philosophers and political scientists and psychologists in his effort to understand why such havoc. There seem to be no answers, only responses. And people like Gene Huntley and the county librarian are the exemplary responses to what is wrong and what is to be done.

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NO ANSWERS

Thaddeus J. Kozinski: *The Political Problem of Religious Pluralism: And Why Philosophers Can't Solve It*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011. Pp. xxv, 263.)

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The subtitle of the book is self-explanatory—the author finds all strictly philosophical accounts inadequate to explain or justify religious pluralism, for which a solution can only be found in theology. He mainly analyzes the work of John Rawls, Jacques Maritain, and Alasdair MacIntyre and along the way brings several others into his account.

Rawls stands in the modern, post-Kantian tradition that denies teleology and sees the political order as a “non-natural artifice of human reason.” Ultimately, however, this modernist position can provide nothing more than a “rhetorically persuasive account of the liberal society” and “cannot establish a universally valid account of reality.”

Rawls makes this descriptive account of the liberal society politically normative, as the only valid polity in the modern world, but he cannot offer a compelling argument for his position, basing it instead on the claim of historical inevitability and the pragmatic benefits it brings. Illogically and unrealistically, he assumes the modern liberal order to be a permanent reality.

Thus a significant number of people are excluded from Rawls’s “overlapping consensus” of viewpoints, with only those who accept modernist assumptions being fully integrated. The “public political culture” alone has the authority to determine the nature of justice, with no further appeal possible.

Rawls’s pluralism fails because, among other things, it requires the religious believer to put aside his beliefs when he enters the public realm, an