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Review: The Wrath of Capital: Neoliberalism and Climate Change Politics

By Adrian Parr

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

San Francisco, California, USA

Parr, Adrian. *The Wrath of Capital: Neoliberalism and Climate Change Politics*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 2012. 216pp. ISBN: 9780231158282. US\$ 29.95 cloth, durable acid free paper.

With its tangents and multiple subjects, a close reading is required to understand and follow *The Wrath of Capital: Neoliberalism and Climate Change Politics* by Adrian Parr, but it is worthwhile anyway. The author is an Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Interior Design, The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Cincinnati. She explores the impact of neoliberalism on the environment and defining it vaguely because it has different meanings to different people. It is also co-opted from the leftist term “liberal,” but recast in an economic framework to support such things as libertarianism and free market forces.

Neoliberalism is defined by Parr as “an exclusive system premised upon the logic of property rights and the expansion of these rights, all the while maintaining that the free market is self-regulating, sufficiently and efficiently working to establish individual and collective well-being” (p. 5). Others have a more critical definition, like Wikipedia which posts that it “refers to economic liberalization, free trade and open markets, privatization, deregulation, and enhancing the role of the private sector in modern society.... The term neoliberal is now normally associated with laissez-faire economic policies, and is used mainly by those who are critical of legislative market reform.”

Parr explores neoliberal forces on a variety of environmental issues (e.g. green house gas regulation, population control, hunger, water, farming and others) but her message is sometimes one of futility. She is saddened that all our stop measures and corrections have not succeeded in practical approaches to warn off the doom of global warming. The book is moving and powerful, but it does not acknowledge all of our achievements. The world is now taking arms against global warming! The problems are not over, so the gains have not been enough, with Parr arguing that we are not free of it even if we are autonomous:

“We are constrained by the historical circumstances into which we are born, along with the institutions and structures that contain us” (p. 2).

Parr writes we have failed, but the blame really does not solely belong to the green messenger.

The author provides a fascinating exploration about how these economic and philosophical perspectives inform our understanding of current issues. Though Parr argues about the failures of the past, the book resonates with the powerful message that we need to plod on with new ideas. The book is definitely think tank material and may not be fully appreciated by practitioners in the field who prefer to simplify. Those who like reading philosophy will be happy to see how it informs this dialogue.

Although this book is a cry to “carry on,” it does not present many new options or ideas. It challenges, like some others, the concept of Nature which has become nebulous because of our pervasive influence on the planet. The concept of Nature in contrast with technological culture is an achievement even if it is more a concern to ecologists and evolutionary scientists concerned about the preservation of the wild, compared with social environmentalists who have absorbed the environmental justice movement.

The book is a good source for debate and will light the fires again, but it is not for those who are just

entering the field. It is not an introductory textbook, but rather for upper division or graduate students who need to think of new ideas and approaches. The market place only sometimes adapts as shown and argued here, but it does seem likely that these readers will benefit from actions that solve global warming as well.

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