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BIO

Richard Evanoff teaches environmental ethics and intercultural ethics in the School of International Politics, Economics, and Communication at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan. He holds an M.A. from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from the Institute for Environment, Philosophy, and Public Policy at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. His main research interest is in how dialogue on environmental and development issues can be effectively conducted across cultures.

Evanoff was a speaker at the U.N. Conference on Dialogue Among Civilizations in 2001 and an invited participant at the Pew Whale Symposium held at the United Nations University in 2008. Evanoff is the author of numerous articles on both environmental ethics and intercultural ethics, and of the book *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics: A Transactional Approach to Achieving Ecological Sustainability, Social Justice, and Human Well-being*, published by Routledge in 2011.

He is a member of the International Society for Environmental Ethics and the International Society for Universal Dialogue. He has also been active in various grassroots organizations and NGOs concerned with social and environmental issues, including the Planet Drum Foundation and Friends of the Earth Japan.

PART 1: "Building Bioregional Politics for an Ecological Civilization" (August 3, 2012)

Richard Evanoff, professor of environmental ethics at Aoyama Gakuin University in Japan, recently wrote the book *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics: A Transactional Approach to Achieving Ecological Sustainability, Social Justice, and Human Well-being*. I corresponded with him on the concepts and applications of bioregionalism, a movement with roots in the ecopolitics of the 1970s, and how it might be useful in turning toward an ecological civilization today. The interview will appear in three parts.

EVAN O'NEIL: Richard, to start off: What defines a bioregion?

RICHARD EVANOFF: The word bioregion simply means "life-place." Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann use the term bioregion to refer to a "geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness—to a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place." Kirkpatrick Sale distinguishes bioregions on the basis of "particular attributes of flora, fauna, water, climate, soils, and landforms, and by the human settlements and cultures those attributes have given rise to." Personally I prefer the term biocultural region, which designates a local geographic area in which specific human cultures develop in relation to the natural ecosystems they inhabit.

EVAN O'NEIL: Is there an ideal bioregional relation between wild spaces and cultivated, human landscapes?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Bioregionalism is consistent with preserving wilderness areas that are relatively free from human interference, while simultaneously acknowledging that there will be other areas in which human cultures and natural ecosystems interact and coexist with each other. Berg distinguishes between "different zones of human interface with natural systems: urban, suburban, rural, and wilderness, [each of which] has a different reinhabitory approach." The key word is reinhabitation, which means finding ways of living that maintain rather than plunder local ecosystems, and that respect rather than destroy biodiversity.

EVAN O'NEIL: Has a phenomenology of bioregionalism been articulated?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Reinhabitation involves not just living in a place, but also having a "sense of place." In a bioregional context, people are aware of where their water, food, and other essential goods come from. They know the land, and are as acquainted with the local flora and fauna as they are with their neighbors. They develop ethical relationships not only with their fellow community members but also with the landscapes they inhabit. They are familiar with the lore, and with how relations between human cultures and the local environment have developed historically. They *care* about what happens to the natural and built environments they live in, both in the present and in the future.

EVAN O'NEIL: What does human community look like from a bioregional perspective? Are there typical forms of political organization that accompany it?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Human communities would be organized in a way that allows individuals to satisfy most of their economic, social, and cultural needs within the local area. Political decision-making would be carried out within the local community, although there are a variety of different forms that this could take, depending on the particular cultures involved. An updated version of the traditional town meetings of New England provides one model for local democratic decision-making in a North American context, for example. Bioregionalism is consistent with a political position that is "neither right nor left but straight ahead." It agrees with conservatives that political power should be devolved away from national governments and remain in the hands of citizens themselves on a purely democratic basis. It goes much further than libertarians, however, in suggesting that economic power should also be devolved away from investors and corporations so that the people who are actually doing the work have both ownership and control over the companies they work for. It should be noted that cooperatives and worker-owned and -managed enterprises are based on private ownership (that is, ownership by the workers themselves), and are thus completely different from Marxist-inspired, government-controlled collectives.

In many ways the bioregional political orientation harks back to Jeffersonian agrarianism, based on the notion that democracy is only possible when both political power and economic wealth are widely spread throughout society. Jefferson's vision is quite different, of course, from the current situation in which wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a small minority of elites, while the role of citizens is reduced to choosing which of those elites will "represent" them in office.

With liberals, bioregionalism agrees that people should maintain democratic political control over the economy rather than rely on unregulated free markets. There is nothing wrong with regulation, provided that it is implemented on the basis of a genuinely democratic

decision-making process controlled by citizens and not by "big government" politicians who presume to represent them. Political freedom based on the democratic principle of one-person, one-vote trumps economic freedom based on the market principle of one-dollar, one-vote.

Given its emphasis on promoting self-reliance at the individual and community level, rather than reliance on government, bioregionalism also has affinities with some aspects of social libertarian, anarchist, and ecofeminist political thought.

EVAN O'NEIL: Your recent book looks at bioregionalism and global ethics. What is the connection? Are there global ethical principles that guide bioregionalism?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Taking the second question first, it might be better to reframe it as What contribution might bioregionalism make to cross-cultural dialogue on a global ethic? My book develops a constructivist approach to ethics, which suggests that ethics is not so much a matter of attempting to formulate foundational ethical principles that can be universally applied, but rather a process of inclusive dialogue in which people from different cultures and ethical traditions attempt to agree on the norms that will govern relations between them and between themselves and the biosphere. To the extent that their actions have no effect beyond their own local sphere, local cultures and traditions are perfectly capable of devising their own specific norms for dealing with relationships among their own people, and between those people and the land they inhabit.

When actions affect others outside the local community, however, it then becomes necessary for the parties to engage in constructive dialogue to determine how relations between them will be conducted. In our present situation, dialogue about global economic and political relations is often conducted in a way that excludes the participation of those who are most affected by the decisions which are made (for example, the decision to close a factory and move its operations overseas; the decision to build a dam that floods land inhabited by local farmers; the decision to implement free trade agreements that are more advantageous to multinational enterprises than to local producers). At present, decisions are often made at the "top" (by governments, corporations, and international institutions, for example), while those at the "bottom" typically lack the power and influence to accept, modify, or reject those decisions.

EVAN O'NEIL: What contribution might bioregionalism make to cross-cultural dialogue on a global ethic?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Following the ideas of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, and democratic theory in general, my book argues that decisions cannot be considered justified unless they are made on the basis of an inclusive dialogue in which all of those who are affected by the result of a decision have the opportunity to participate in the process by which that decision is reached.

With regard to the first question, in a similar spirit of cross-cultural dialogue, my book proposes that a global ethic should minimally concern itself with three goals: "(1) promoting ecological sustainability in degrees sufficient to allow both human and nonhuman life to thrive; (2) achieving social justice both within and between cultures; and (3) maximizing human well-being in the sense of providing both for the material needs of individuals and for their full psychological, social, and cultural development."

The book then argues that the current "dominant development paradigm"—based on universalizing the model of industrialization and consumerism found in so-called "developed" countries—is unable to meet these goals. The dominant development paradigm is unsustainable because the Earth simply does not have the resources to enable everyone on the

planet to enjoy the same high levels of material affluence found in developed countries; moreover, the attempt to continue pursuing high levels of economic growth, even in developed countries, ultimately leads to social and environmental collapse.

The dominant development paradigm is socially unjust because it allows the top 20 percent of the Earth's population to consume 80 percent of available resources, while the bottom 80 percent has access to only 20 percent; moreover, such inequalities are in part the result of a global system that has been intentionally designed to shift resources from poor to rich. The dominant development paradigm is unable to maximize human well-being because it reduces people to consumers, while ignoring their other psychological, social and cultural needs.

The book then develops an alternative bioregional paradigm that is able to meet each of the three goals by acknowledging that there are limits to economic growth, which means that social justice can be achieved not by helping so-called "developing" countries catch up with developed countries, but only by providing for equitable access to resources. The bioregional paradigm does not involve transferring wealth or technology from developed to developing countries, but instead advocates "delinking" the two so that resources do not continue to flow from poor to rich. The industrial-consumerist model of development is replaced in the bioregional paradigm by a more equitable form of development.

The developed countries need to learn to live more sustainably within the confines of the local resources available to them rather than exploiting the resources of others. Developing countries would then have full access to their own local resources as the basis for developing their own sustainable economies. The industrial-consumerist model of development is replaced in the bioregional paradigm by a more equitable form of development that is able to satisfy the full range of basic human needs in ecologically sustainable ways.

The idea of transferring vast amounts of wealth and technology from developed to developing countries only makes sense in the context of a development paradigm that aims at industrialization and consumerism. In fact such transfers often benefit only a small minority of people in developing countries, while actually worsening the situation of the poor. A lot of money is needed, for example, to build the dam that supplies the electricity to power the factory that produces goods for export on the global market. But how do the people whose homes and farms have been flooded by the dam, and who must start over in new, often poorer locations, benefit from such projects?

Achieving basic human well-being in ecologically sustainable and self-sufficient ways does not require a lot of money, and it destroys neither local livelihoods nor local environments.

PART 2: "The Practice of Bioregionalism" (August 9, 2023)

Richard Evanoff, professor of environmental ethics at Aoyama Gakuin University in Japan, recently wrote the book *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics: A Transactional Approach to Achieving Ecological Sustainability, Social Justice, and Human Well-being*. I corresponded with him on the concepts and applications of bioregionalism, a movement with roots in the ecopolitics of the 1970s, and how it might be useful in turning toward an ecological civilization today. In part one we discussed the political underpinnings of the movement; here we look at some of the practices.

EVAN O'NEIL: Who practices bioregionalism today? Have they had success?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Bioregionalism is a concept that can be used to describe any tendency, whether it calls itself "bioregional" or not, that seeks to empower people to live economically self-sufficient and ecologically sustainable lifestyles based in local communities. As such, bioregionalism attempts to articulate in contemporary terms a way of life that has been practiced by humans throughout most of their history—that is, the idea that societies should be organized on the basis of local communities, which attempt to provide for their basic needs on the basis of resources available at the local level.

Many indigenous peoples continue to organize their societies in this way and their cultures are increasingly threatened by attempts to exploit their resources (the underlying theme of the movie *Avatar*, incidentally). There is also an attempt to pull local communities that are relatively self-sufficient at present into the global market by seeing them as a source of cheap labor and markets. While some are no doubt attracted by the idea that they may eventually be able to live the same kind of lifestyles as people in developed countries, there is also a great deal of resistance among those who would prefer to maintain their traditional cultures and lifestyles.

Instead of trying to reform existing institutions, bioregionalists seek to actively create viable alternatives. Movements have also sprung up in developed countries that attempt to prepare for a future in which energy resources are limited and life will, of necessity, be increasingly based on the ability to live within the limits of what is locally available. The "transition towns" movement, which started in Ireland and the United Kingdom around 2005 and has since spread around the world, is a good example of this trend. The transition movement seeks to move away from oil dependency towards local sources of renewable energy, to shift from global to local food supplies, to foster local sustainable forms of housing and transportation, to create local currencies that keep wealth in the local community and provide local sources of finance, and to create local forms of community that empower people to participate directly and democratically in the decision-making process.

In developing countries, there have been movements to preserve local environments and maintain traditional livelihoods. Examples include attempts to prevent deforestation and dam construction in India; to obtain land that can be used to produce food for local consumption rather than export in Brazil (the landless movement); to reclaim abandoned factories and institute worker-management in Argentina (the *fábricas recuperadas* movement, which has affinities with the cooperative movement worldwide); to institute worker cooperatives and forms of local self-government (communal councils) in Venezuela, and to oppose neoliberalism and reclaim local autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico (the Zapatistas). These are just a few of the many instances of efforts in the developing world to regain control over local economies and local political decision-making, even if the people involved do not self-identify as "bioregionalists."

Among those who do self-identify as bioregionalists, many have been active in similar initiatives to maintain resilient interactions between local human cultures and ecosystems. The best source of information about such projects is the publication *Planet Drum Pulse*, published by the Planet Drum Foundation, originally started by Peter Berg, one of the founders of bioregionalism. The Planet Drum Foundation works to develop bioregional practices in Bahia de Caráquez, Ecuador.

The bioregional approach can be seen as "pro-active," rather than as simply a form of protest against existing social, economic, and political arrangements. That is, instead of trying to reform existing institutions, bioregionalists seek to actively create viable alternatives—"building the new society in the shell of the old."

While many bioregionalists eschew electoral politics in favor of building such alternatives, others have been active in both the Greens/Green Party USA and the Green Party of the United States. These parties originated out of a meeting of the First North American

Bioregional Congress held in 1984 near Kansas City, Missouri. The Greens base themselves on Ten Key Values, each of which is fully consistent with bioregional principles: (1) grassroots democracy; (2) social justice and equal opportunity; (3) ecological wisdom; (4) non-violence; (5) decentralization; (6) community-based economics and economic justice; (7) feminism and gender equity; (8) respect for diversity; (9) personal and global responsibility; and (10) future focus and sustainability.

EVAN O'NEIL: Does bioregionalism mostly resist globalization or can it find ways to coexist?

RICHARD EVANOFF: The emphasis of bioregionalism on decentralization and localism has been criticized by some on the grounds that it promotes insularity and parochialism. While, indeed, certain groups (particularly indigenous peoples who wish to preserve their traditional cultures) may wish to avoid contact with the outside world and remain relatively isolated, bioregionalism itself embraces the slogan "act locally, think globally." Bioregionalism is sympathetic with many of the goals of the anti-globalization movement simply because globalization, as it is presently conceived, is undemocratic and tends to favor the interests of global elites more than it does the interests of ordinary citizens.
While bioregionalism indeed "resists" and does not wish to "coexist" with any form of globalization that excludes the participation of citizens and communities in the global decision-making process, it is nonetheless fully able to express international solidarity with social movements around the world seeking to create forms of globalization that are genuinely of, by, and for the people. My book favors a global order based on participatory democracy and calls for "the creation of economically self-sufficient and politically decentralized communities delinked from the global market but confederated at appropriate levels to address problems that transcend cultural borders." Local communities can confederate into larger units, as necessary, to deal with problems that cross multiple bioregions.

International cooperation is necessary (perhaps a new word, such as "inter-bioregional," should be coined), but to be as democratic as possible, power should be based in the local community, where citizens have the ability to fully participate in the decision-making process. Local communities can confederate into larger units, as necessary, to deal with problems that cross bioregional lines. Each problem could then be dealt with at the appropriate level—local problems by local initiatives and global problems through global cooperation.

If such an idea seems impractical, consider that the United States already has a federal system, comprised of the fifty states, and that the United States participates in multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations. Bioregionalism would simply advocate adding local communities to the federal process, and then assuring that decision-making power flows from the bottom-up rather than from the top-down, as at present. South American countries such as Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina have already begun experimenting with various forms of local self-government, including communal councils and neighborhood assemblies.

EVAN O'NEIL: How much of a threat does climate change pose to bioregions? Is stopping climate change a key motivation for bioregionalists?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Climate change is already having an enormous effect on both ecosystems and human well-being, and the situation is only likely to get worse in the future. Given the failure of national governments and international initiatives, such as the Kyoto Protocol, to effectively address the issue of climate change, a different approach is clearly needed. Organizations such as 350.org, started by Bill McKibben in 2008, seek to mobilize

grassroots support for reducing CO_2 emissions below 350 parts per million (the maximum level of emissions considered to be safe). The movement is in accord with the bioregional principle that change is most effective when it comes from below rather than the top. McKibben is, moreover, a strong supporter of local economies and grassroots political action.

EVAN O'NEIL: Environmentalism seems to have bifurcated along a dark-to-bright green spectrum, with anti-civilizational "ecoterrorists" at one extreme and geoengineering techno-optimists at the other. Where does bioregionalism fall?

RICHARD EVANOFF: I would want to reframe this question on the ground that it seems unfair to label those who try to preserve natural areas in ways that are totally nonviolent to both human and nonhuman life as "terrorists" while failing to apply the same term to corporations and governments that engage in massive acts of ecological destruction while simultaneously ignoring basic human rights. Why are deaths caused by industrial pollution and indiscriminate warfare not classified as acts of "terrorism"?

Probably the extremes can be better represented by making a distinction between techno-optimists, on the one hand, who think that we should continue with our present course and rely on future technological achievements to save us from environmental and social collapse, and neo-primitivists, on the other, who advocate going back to pre-civilizational forms of society with no technology. The neo-primitivist tendency is quite minor, and the attempt on the part of some commentators to paint the entire environmental movement as neo-primitivist is nothing more than willful misrepresentation.

Bioregionalism advocates using appropriate technologies that meet human needs in sustainable ways.

Bioregionalism tries to stake a middle position between these two extremes. Techno-optimism is based on an almost religious-like faith in future technological developments that do not yet even exist, and simply turns a blind eye to the large-scale environmental destruction that is taking place at present. Bioregionalism is not anti-technology per se, but rather suggests that we need to be working *now* to bring our economic and social systems within natural limits.

First, this involves creating steady-state economies that do not use resources faster than they can be replenished, or create pollution faster than the Earth can naturally absorb it. In other words, in order to sustain our own lives and cultures we need to live within our ecological means. Second, human societies must be maintained in a way that enables other, nonhuman forms of life to flourish also—that is, that protects biodiversity and promotes continued natural evolution. Moreover, these are things we can begin doing *now*, with existing technology, rather than waiting for the development of purely hypothetical future technologies that may or may not be able to live up to their claims.

Our current forms of technology are, in any event, mainly aimed at increasing economic growth and promoting consumer societies that are patently unsustainable. Bioregionalism advocates using appropriate technologies that meet human needs in sustainable ways and allow for the flourishing of both human and nonhuman life forms.

PART 3: "Can Bioregionalism Go Global Before Collapse?" (August 10, 2023)

Richard Evanoff, professor of environmental ethics at Aoyama Gakuin University in Japan, recently wrote the book *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics: A Transactional Approach to Achieving Ecological Sustainability, Social Justice, and Human Well-being*. I corresponded with him on the concepts and applications of bioregionalism, a movement with roots in the ecopolitics of the 1970s, and how it might be useful in turning toward an ecological

civilization today. In part one we discussed the political underpinnings of the movement; in part two some of the implementation; here we look at whether bioregionalism can scale globally.

EVAN O'NEIL: There has been a movement in some countries to grant rights to ecosystems and even to Mother Nature. Is this a helpful approach?

RICHARD EVANOFF: In the United States the idea of giving rights to nature can be found in the dissenting opinion of Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas in the *Sierra Club v. Morton* decision of 1972. Douglas argued that if corporations could be regarded as "persons" for legal purposes, natural ecosystems should also be granted standing before the law. The present constitutions of both Ecuador and Bolivia grant rights to ecological systems. From a bioregional perspective it is possible to simultaneously protect both human rights and the rights of nature on the basis of creating a symbiotic relationship between human cultures and the natural environments they inhabit.

The dichotomy "humans vs. the environment" only arises in the context of current forms of industrial society that promote the excessive consumption of resources at the expense of the environment. Thus, providing a constitutional and legal basis for preserving the rights of nature makes perfect sense as a reaction to a global economic and political order that prioritizes economic growth over environmental preservation. Societies that were truly organized along bioregional lines would seek to preserve natural environments as a matter of course, even if the rights of nature were not formally protected by law.

EVAN O'NEIL: Other policy ideas include Payments for Environmental Services, paying developing countries not to extract resources such as oil, and alternative economic measures like the Happy Planet Index. Do these tactics have promise?

RICHARD EVANOFF: The whole idea of trying to place a monetary value on environmental services and ecosystems is questionable from a bioregional perspective. Natural environments should be protected because people realize the extent to which both human and nonhuman life is dependent on such systems. Ultimately monetary compensation is no substitute for protection based on a recognition of the fact that good human societies cannot be created in the absence of good natural environments, and vice versa.

On the other hand, the bioregional paradigm is fully supportive of efforts to rethink what constitutes genuine human well-being and of attempts to formulate different methods for measuring it, including not only the Happy Planet Index, but also other indices, such as the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, the Genuine Progress Indicator, and Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index.

EVAN O'NEIL: How do you feel about multilateral processes like Rio+20 and the UNFCCC?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Such international forums are at best irrelevant and, at worst, something to be opposed, given the extent to which they are manipulated by business interests acting in concert with national governments. They exclude the full participation of groups acting on behalf of the interests of citizens and the environment, and are unable to come up with genuinely effective solutions. The range of solutions that can be adopted at such forums is severely limited by the need to refrain from making any proposals that threaten corporate interests or continued economic growth, in both the developed and developing worlds.

Moreover, by concentrating decision-making power at the global level, such processes simply co-opt the ability of indigenous peoples and local communities to protect their own

environments. Real change will not come until citizens themselves reclaim their ability to take effective action. The key question, from a bioregional perspective, is how to mobilize citizens to do so.

EVAN O'NEIL: So how does bioregionalism scale and spread and catch on?

RICHARD EVANOFF: Bioregionalism as such is only a very small part of a much larger movement on the part of people around the world to gain power over their own lives and to practice sustainable lifestyles within the context of local communities and environments. What bioregionalists can contribute to the larger movement is an analysis and critique of the current global situation, and the formulation of viable alternatives, in both theory and practice. Real change will not come until citizens themselves reclaim their ability to take effective action.

Currently there is a much greater awareness of the pitfalls of the present form of globalization among people in developing countries, who are often those most affected by policies that strip them of their local resources and livelihoods, as well as of any political power to resist such policies. Nonetheless, such people are beginning to organize to reclaim their ability to make their own decisions and to protect both their local communities and environments.

Consciousness of the problems associated with current forms of globalization is much less widespread among people in developed countries, who have been the primary beneficiaries of the exploitation of resources and labor from developing countries. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements in the United States, people are beginning to recognize that something is "not quite right" with our present system.

As more jobs disappear overseas due to outsourcing and governments increasingly lose tax revenue to support social services, the middle class in the United States is now beginning to experience what has been a fact of life for the lower classes for the past few decades, since globalization really began to take off. The present troubles of the European Union are, at least in part, due to its economic centralization policies. Nonetheless, there still seems to be a lot of faith among people in developed countries in the idea that the system can be reformed and the old industrial-consumerist model restored, through more economic growth, better-paying jobs, and the like.

Bioregionalism suggests that the old order cannot be restored, simply because we are entering a period in which resources (particularly energy resources) are rapidly dwindling, pollution (especially related to climate change) is increasing, food production may be unable to keep up with population growth, and environmental problems have become truly global, affecting the entire planet—the air, water, land, and oceans that we depend on to sustain human and nonhuman life.

It takes a considerable amount of looking the other way to fail to see just how dire our current situation is. Already in 1972 *The Limits to Growth* warned that unless we seriously curtail excessive industrial production and curb population growth, the present economy would collapse around the year 2035. More recent editions of the book (published in 1992 and 2002), show that we are already living "beyond the limits," and that there is considerably less time for us to be able to make the transition to a truly sustainable economy that can meet basic human needs.

The basic scenario presented in the limits-to-growth literature has been confirmed by a number of other studies, which show that we are in a period not only of peak oil, but of "peak everything." A considerable literature has also developed around the concept of "degrowth"—the idea that we should be intentionally trying to reduce overconsumption among the top 20

percent of the Earth's population. The future will inevitably be one of lower resource consumption, in which communities are obliged to meet their basic needs on the basis of locally available resources.

Technology alone will not be able to prop up the present system. Trashing landscapes in search of more fossil fuels and burning food for biofuel do not seem like attractive ways of providing energy for the future. What we should be doing is preserving and maintaining as much of the natural environment as possible, while taking proactive measures to provide for basic needs on a universal scale.

Bioregionalism is often dismissed as a "utopian" perspective on the grounds that it is "not what people want," and to some extent this is no doubt true. We remain captivated by the idea that developed countries can continue to pursue unlimited economic growth and that developing countries will eventually be able to catch up with the developed countries in terms of material affluence. It is really this latter view that is utopian, however, simply because the Earth does not have enough resources to be able to maintain current levels of overconsumption, let alone extend consumerism universally.

The Global Footprint Network estimates that it would take the resources of five planet Earths for everyone on the planet to able to have the same consumer lifestyles currently prevalent in the United States. So, there is a tremendous gap between our aspirations and our ecological realities. Neither the media nor the educational system have done a very good job of making people aware of these issues. Given the ability of current economic and political actors to limit the range of what is regarded as acceptable political discourse, one of the most urgent needs at present is to simply make people aware of the situation and propose viable alternatives. I suspect that this will happen not through the established channels of political deliberation but rather through alternative forms of political organizing and communication (such as the Internet).

There are reasons to be skeptical about the possibilities for avoiding collapse and instituting a genuinely sustainable economy, given the low level of awareness about these issues, particularly in developed countries. If collapse cannot be avoided, it is likely that the developed countries, which are currently so dependent on global trade, will suffer the most, while people in developing countries who are already capable of providing for their needs on the basis of local resources (to the extent that these have not already been plundered) will be in the best position to preserve both their livelihoods and local cultures.

Even if total collapse can be avoided in the developed countries, it is possible that the result will be a new feudalism, in which current elites are able to maintain power and relative wealth, backed up by increased militarization and surveillance, as we already see happening at present, while the rest of the population is reduced to subservient status. For many people in developed countries the future could look much like the current situation in Detroit, where industry and government social services have collapsed, and people are beginning to turn to more self-sufficient methods of survival, such as urban agriculture.

The bioregional vision is achievable not utopian, when people decide it is the kind of future they would like to create.

Bioregionalism proposes an alternative future in which overconsumption is drastically reduced, and the focus is shifted to providing for the human well-being of all on the basis of local forms of energy, agriculture, housing, and manufacturing. In the short term this shift would necessitate giving up jobs that are based on the global economy and access to consumer goods produced overseas, but these are likely to disappear in the near future in any event. In the long term, the shift would involve stimulating local economies, so that everyone can be usefully employed in the production of food and goods that meet their basic needs, and also provide for greater democratic participation in the political decision-making process.

By avoiding planned obsolescence, which necessitates higher resource consumption and the generation of more waste in the interest of selling more products to insure higher profits, and instead making products that are durable, repairable, and recyclable, working hours can also be reduced, allowing people more free time to pursue other personal and cultural activities. The bioregional vision is, in fact, not "utopian," but realistically achievable, if and when people decide it is the kind of future they would like to create.