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Review of Balancing Self, Society, and the Environment: Evanoff's Transactional Approach to Global Ethics

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Evanoff, Richard. 2011. *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics: A Transactional Approach to Achieving Ecological Sustainability, Social Justice, and Human Well-being*. New York: Routledge.

In *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics*, Evanoff attempts to create a new global ethic that minimally concerns itself with the goals of fostering ecological sustainability, realizing social justice within cultures and between them, and maximizing the well-being of humans (1). This new ethic, which is crafted using bioregional principles such as the importance of local bioregions, utilizes a “transactional framework” based on the view that interactions between nature, self, and society should be understood as fundamentally dialectical in nature. For Evanoff, the individual, society, and environment do not have to be conflicting but can be harmonized within a single ethic without compromising the integrity of each. This transactional approach is given as an alternative to the dominant development paradigm which is largely focused on economic growth and bringing “underdeveloped” countries into the larger global economy.

Evanoff argues that ethical dilemmas within social ethics predominantly arise when individual and group interests fall out of harmony with each other (39). In a similar fashion, dilemmas also arise when human and environmental interests clash. We can imagine societies that foster human well-being and social justice but at the cost of environmental sustainability. We can also imagine societies that foster environmental sustainability and human well-being but at the cost of social justice. The problem, then, for Evanoff is achieving forms of culture that are socially just while at the same time preserving nature and promoting human well-being (39–40). Evanoff argues that current societies fall short of this goal and that neither capitalism nor communism can give us the tools needed to solve problems (such as resource depletion) that we are currently facing or the means to live satisfying and environmentally sound lives (14). Thus “deep structural changes in society are...called for” (43). While it may be hard for some to imagine a world where first-world politicians call for limiting consumerism and where third-world politicians urge moderation in development, Evanoff argues that the bioregional paradigm, and his ethic crafted from it, will give us a clearer conception of what possibilities are objectively available to us in our current situation (45).

Bioregionalism and Global Ethics consists of the following six parts: “A Bioregional Perspective on Global Ethics,” “A Transactional Framework for Bioregional Ethics,” “Harmonizing Self, Society, and Nature,” “A Bioregional Paradigm for Global Ethics,” “Bioregionalism in a Global Context,” and “Globalism in Its Place.” Part I largely consists of chapters that develop a transactional perspective of global ethics as a strategy to meet the goals listed above. Part II predominantly deals with reframing environmental ethics so that it moves away from asking how we can preserve nature in the context of un-ecological forms of social, political, and economic systems and towards asking how the systems

themselves might be transformed to become ecologically sustainable. Part III investigates how a dichotomized view of nature and culture might be overcome. Part IV offers a critique of the dominant development paradigm which largely focuses on economic growth. Part V develops a bioregional model of development that Evanoff argues can best cultivate the natural and cultural diversity needed to promote ecological sustainability and social equality. Part VI suggests that creating an alternative “world order” along bioregional lines will link bioregionalism with current social libertarian projects, such as disrupting social hierarchies.

Readers of *Environmental Philosophy* will certainly be interested in all chapters but those in Part III will be of particular interest because they outline Evanoff’s specific bioregional approach to ethics, place this approach within the larger ethical context, and offer critiques and comparisons of other environmental ethics, such as Leopold’s Land Ethic. Other readers concerned with the connections between global ethics and environmental sustainability will be especially interested in Parts I, IV, and V as this is where Evanoff connects his ethic to concerns typically found within development ethics, such as defining what form “development” should or should not take. Finally, those interested in teaching bioregionalism may find this book particularly valuable as it is well researched and illustrates connections between bioregionalism and other philosophies.

While *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics* has the above strengths, there are two key weaknesses found within the text. First, there is a marked lack of argumentation within the book. While reading, I often found the author making claim after claim without defending each with careful arguments. This can be particularly frustrating for readers used to well laid out and carefully reasoned texts. However, it is clear in the introduction that Evanoff recognizes this limitation as he makes the point of informing readers that his approach will be synthetic instead of analytic. The result is a work that feels more like a manifesto or a work of creative philosophy where philosophical pieces are connected or quilted together to form a unique new structure.

Second, crafting an ethic that tries to achieve “ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being” seems like a monumental task not easily accomplished within a book 285 pages long. While the fact that this is a synthetic rather than analytic work helps to explain the relative shortness of the text, I still feel that more work needs to be done to further develop these ideas. The text is exhaustively researched and Evanoff’s ethical approach is well outlined, however the text seems more like a framework where areas still need to be fleshed out. For example, I personally would like to have more information on how this specific bioregional ethic would play out in reality and how exactly we would go about putting such an ethic into practice. Perhaps future work by this author or work that utilizes his transactional approach will provide further details.

Bioregionalism and Global Ethics offers an interesting new ethic and I think readers of *Environmental Philosophy* will enjoy reading the book. Also it makes connections between development ethics, social justice, and environmental ethics that I feel are sorely needed. Overall, people interested in environmental ethics, development ethics, social justice, and connections between these fields should take the time to read this book.