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Article

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Introduction

This paper suggests that current trends towards globalization are creating entirely new social and environmental problems which require cross-cultural dialogue towards the creation of a new "global ethic." Such an ethic should minimally concern itself with:

> (1) maximizing human flourishing in the sense of providing both for the material needs of individuals and for their full psychological, social, and cultural development; (2) achieving social justice both within and between cultures; (3) promoting environmental integrity in degrees sufficient to allow both human and non-human life to thrive (Evanoff 2005, pp. 107–108).

These proposals are based on a transactional view of the relationship between self, society, and nature, which sees each of these three poles as interacting with the others in dialectical ways (Steiner 1993; Evanoff 2008). Rather than regard individual, social, and environmental concerns in conflictual terms, a transactional approach attempts to harmonize them, while preserving a measure of autonomy for each.

In this paper two guiding visions for a modern global society are introduced and contrasted. The first guiding vision, referred to as the dominant development paradigm, advocates high economic growth on a global scale and seeks to bring "developing" countries up to the same material standards of living as those prevalent in the so-called "developed" countries. The dominant development paradigm is based on an implicit global ethic in which differences are permitted with respect to

consumer choice but discouraged with respect to points of view which challenge how power and wealth are distributed in society.

The second guiding vision, the bioregional paradigm, 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. A bioregional perspective on a global ethic contends that there should be sufficient convergence between cultures to allow for the successful resolution of mutual problems, but also sufficient divergence to allow for adequate levels of cultural diversity and continued cultural evolution.

The paper will offer a summary account of each of these paradigms, and suggest that the bioregional paradigm offers a better framework for cross-cultural dialogue on a global ethic than does the dominant development paradigm.

The dominant development paradigm

Current trends toward globalization — toward the creation of a "global market" economically, a "new world order" politically, and "borderless societies" culturally — offer the prospect of a world in which human well-being, social justice, and environmental integrity can best be achieved through free trade based on neoliberal economic principles and transnational forms of economic and political coordination centered in global institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. This vision, which will be referred to in this paper as the dominant development paradigm, is often justified on the grounds that it will usher in a new era of global cooperation in which war will be eliminated, poverty overcome, and environmental problems solved through unimpeded technological advances and economic growth.

It can be argued, however, that there is a darker side to this vision and that the promises it advances cannot be fulfilled. While globalization may indeed create higher levels of material prosperity for some, it also involves the systemic exploitation of both human and natural resources, and results in the destruction of both cultural and ecological diversity.

(The literature documenting the negative effects of globalization is vast, despite the fact it is largely ignored or misrepresented by both educationalists and the mass media, and remains for the most part unknown to the general public. Some of the more notable critiques include: Brecher, Childs, and Cutler 1993; Nader *et al.* 1993; Brecher and Costello 1994; Solomon 1995; Mander and Goldsmith 1996; Greider 1997; Martin and Schumann 1997; Sassen 1998; Shutt 1998; 2001; Soros 1998; Black 1999; Hahnel 1999; Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2000; Dierckxsens 2000; Frank 2000; French 2000; Pieterse 2000; Rajaee 2000; Starr 2000; Ugarteche 2000; Bello 2001; 2004; Elwood 2001; Goldsmith and Mander 2001; Houtart and Polet 2001; International Forum on Globalization 2001; Khor 2001; Petras and Veltmeyer 2001; Roddick 2001; Szentes 2001; Comeliau 2002; Feffer 2002; Klein 2002; Tabb 2002; Fisher and Ponniah 2003; Gélinas 2003; Madeley 2003; Smiers 2003; Buckman 2004; Cavanagh and Mander 2004; Monbiot 2004; Wooden and Lucas 2004; Singh 2005).

Modernist views of progress, both Marxist and capitalist, are premised on a unilinear view of cultural development which takes as its normative stance the view that all the various cultures of the world should eventually converge in a single global economic, political, and social order. The primary conflict between Marxism and capitalism lies less in the end-goal of modernization itself than in the method by which modernization is to be achieved and in the social structures that will ultimately govern it. In the Marxist view history is seen as moving along a single trajectory in accordance with the laws of dialectical materialism. Marxist internationalism takes as its task the creation of a stateless global society in which nature is mastered and human freedom is no longer bound by its dictates. Rostow (1991), whose views typify the capitalist position, argues that all economies can be plotted on a five-stage continuum which leads from (1) traditional society, to (2) preconditions for "take off," to (3) "take off," to (4) a drive to maturity, to (5) high mass consumption. The end goal is for all countries to eventually become the "same" as the developed countries.

With the collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and

Eastern Europe, and the transformation of nominal communist countries, such as China, into active participants in the global market, development along capitalist lines is now typically taken as the single goal which all cultures should pursue. This goal has gained such wide acceptance throughout the world that it is probably the closest humankind has come yet to agreeing on a universal set of values and constitutes a de facto global ethic. In the seeming absence of viable alternatives, it is easy to entertain Fukuyama's (1992) neo-Hegelian argument that we have reached the "end of history" and now stand at the brink of an unending millennium of peace and prosperity. Capitalism has triumphed over all its competitors and no further political or social change of a paradigmatic nature is deemed necessary or desirable; existing problems can be handled entirely through piecemeal reforms.

The dominant paradigm expresses itself most fully in the view that "third-world" or "developing" countries should take the developed countries (both Western countries such as the US and Asian countries such as Japan) as models and attempt to eventually "catch up" with them, not only in terms of attaining the same economic standard of living, but also in terms of evolving similar political institutions (based on liberal democratic nation-states), similar forms of knowledge (based on Western science), and similar forms of mass culture (based on passive consumerism, or what Ritzer 1996 refers to as the "McDonaldization" of culture). The dominant development paradigm assumes, in a spirit that resurrects old imperialist conceits, that since developed countries are "rich" and technologically "superior," they have a moral obligation to "help" countries which are "poor" and technologically "backward" (*cf.* Sachs 1993).

Globalization, particularly in its modern neoliberal form, casts itself not in the role of oppressor but rather as liberator, of course. By emphasizing "freedom" and "choice," the global market presents itself as a value-neutral sphere in which people can come together to satisfy needs and desires of their own choosing. No one is pressured into conformity, nor "forced" to participate. In the neoliberal view, there can be no broader conception of what a good society or a good relationship to the

natural environment would be like. Since values are seen as being determined by individuals, there is no overarching set of moral principles to guide societies towards more humanly satisfying, socially just, and ecologically sustainable ends; everything is governed by the impersonal, invisible hand of the market. It is thus assumed that there is no need for people to specifically concern themselves with creating a good society; rather, a good society can be produced by individuals simply pursuing their own self-interests.

A deeper analysis reveals, however, that the present system is in fact based on an implicit and highly structured set of values which are held to be in some sense universal. If culture is defined narrowly in terms of varying tastes in fashion, music, and food, then difference can be tolerated, even encouraged, as a matter of consumer preference. If culture is defined more broadly, however, to include alternative conceptions of how political, economic, and social life should be structured, then there are clear limits to the amount of difference that capitalism is capable of tolerating. Difference is permitted within the present system but only within the parameters set by the global market and the political institutions which support it. Societies which defy these parameters are encouraged to either reenter the fold of the "international system" or face marginalization and suppression.

Capitalism, as much as Marxism, contains totalizing impulses, as evidenced by its attempt eventually join all of humanity together in a single global market and political order, while offering the illusion of freedom and choice. Globalization can be seen as marking the final victory of a capitalist "world system" which began with the global expansion of capital in the age of discovery (*cf.* Wallerstein 1974–1989; 1979; 1982) and has now become powerful enough to pull every country into its sphere of gravity. The danger of such a system is not only that culture becomes tasteless, with little that is genuinely novel and adventurous, but also that it locks in place social structures which are both exploitive and unethical, effectively diminishing prospects for further cultural evolution in genuinely new directions. The net effect is ultimately a reduction of genuine diversity at the personal, cultural, and environmental levels.

What begins as the "global village" ends up as a "global monoculture." Sachs writes, "...the spreading monoculture has eroded viable alternatives to the industrial, growth-oriented society and dangerously crippled humankind's capacity to meet an increasingly different future with creative responses" (1992, p. 4).

Given the problems of the North, particularly with respect to its dismal environmental record and deteriorating social conditions, it is doubtful that developed countries can unhypocritically set themselves up as models for developing countries to follow. Advanced industrial civilization has brought the world many benefits to be sure, but its attendant evils are symptomatic of a deep illness. We do not, at present, simply face one or two problems which can be solved by tinkering with the present system but rather a whole confluence of problems which require a fundamental rethinking of how we interact with each other and with the planet. Modern civilization faces not only the environmental problems of global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain, water pollution, toxic and nuclear wastes, increasing garbage, decreasing natural resources, desertification, the destruction of tropical rainforests and the world's remaining wilderness areas, and perhaps the fastest rate of species extinction in the history of the planet, but also the social problems of homelessness, drug abuse, crime, violence, alienation, unemployment, and poverty. These problems are not the result of private, individual failure, as the liberal approach to ethics prevalent in the West asks us to believe, but rather of systemic, social failure.

Simply put, the capitalist system in its past, present, and projected future forms is unlikely to be able to provide people with the means to live materially adequate, emotionally satisfying, and environmentally sound lives. If this is the best that can be hoped for, then what Fukuyama has called the "end of history" is just that: a cultural dead-end in which we resign ourselves to accepting the system as it is, with no hope of changing it. For those who are dissatisfied with this system, however, the goal should not be simply the destruction of civilization and a return to precivilized times, but rather the creation of a genuinely better civilization which is able to provide for the needs of all in environmentally

sound ways.

The bioregional paradigm

Both bioregionalists and critics of international development have mounted a sharp critique of the dominant development paradigm and the homogenizing effects of globalization, expressing concern not only about the creation of a global market and political order but also about the decline of natural and cultural diversity. (For critiques of capitalist-style development see Hancock 1989; Trainer 1985; 1989; Amin 1990; Sachs 1992; 1993; 1999; Chatterjee and Finger 1994; Sachs, Loske, and Linz 1998; Biel 2000; Kim *et al.* 2000; Randel, German, and Ewing 2000; De Rivero 2001; Black 2002; Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2003; Dicther 2003; Blaser, Feit, and McRae 2004; Sachs and Santarius 2007. Key texts on bioregionalism include Dasmann 1976; Berg 1978; 1981; Andruss *et al.* 1990; Berg, Magilavy, and Zuckerman 1990; Dodge 1992; Evanoff 1999; 2007; Flores 1999; McGinnis 1999; Thomashow 1999; Sale 2000; Desai and Riddleston 2002; Thayer 2003; Whitaker 2007).

In an early article outlining the main tenets of bioregionalism Berg accused late industrial society of creating a "global monoculture" based on " . . . a homogenized directory of standards for everything from diet and clothes to transportation and architecture" (1981, p. 25). Sachs (1992, p. 4), who has already been referred to above, speaks in similar terms of a "cultural monoculture" which simplifies human artefacts, reduces linguistic and cultural diversity, and even standardizes what people hope for and desire — all on a global scale. Indigenous cultures have been particularly vulnerable to the onslaught of globalization (see Davidson 1993).

Given the homogenizing effects of global capitalism, the approach to ethics offered by bioregionalism is one which preserves cultural diversity and yet allows people from different cultures to maintain healthy interactions with each other and with their natural environments. An alternative bioregional paradigm attempts to reconcile local forms of development, based on local control over the economy and polity, with global forms of communication that maintain healthy relations between com-

munities and allow joint action on problems of mutual concern. Bioregionalism is based on a multilinear, rather than a unilinear, model of cultural development (*cf.* Steward 1955). Multilinear cultural evolution results in a variety of different cultures coming to occupy a variety of different regions to form what Norgaard calls a "patchwork quilt" (1994, p. 90). Engel similarly sees the earth as a "mosaic of coevolving, self-governing communities" (1990, p. 15). Such a perspective endorses a healthy measure of both biological and cultural diversity.

It may be thought that bioregionalism, with the emphasis it places on localism and decentralization, would be inclined to adopt a purely relativist stance towards ethics. Indeed, such a "postmodern" reading of bioregionalism is offered by Cheney (1993), who argues that bioregionalism necessitates a rejection of foundationalism and the embrace of a contextual position which more or less limits ethics to the narratives which emerge within local communities. Cheney contends that since cross-cultural dialogue cannot be universalizing, the best it can hope for is to be merely comparative. It can be countered, however, that the only way this stance can be maintained is if cultures remain completely isolated from each other, in which case ethics would serve to govern relations exclusively among people within specific cultures. In cases in which cultures interact with each other, there is the need to co-create the norms which will govern interactions between them. The alternative is either the imposition of one culture's norms on other cultures, or irresolvable conflicts because each of the cultures remains inflexibly committed to its own norms and is unable to come to any genuine appreciation of the norms of the other culture.

Certainly one possible response to globalization is total retrenchment in which communities seek to turn back the clock and return to a pre-global society in which communities live in more or less complete isolation from each other. While such a move seems unlikely, given the high degree of communication that already exists between different cultures, it may appropriately be adopted as a desideratum among some groups, provided that whatever actions they undertake have no consequences beyond their own cultural boundaries. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that such

groups would be able to completely isolate themselves from the conse-
quences of modernization — problems such as global warming, acid
rain, and the threat of nuclear annihilation have no respect for cultural
boundaries. Moreover, the very fact that isolated groups are disconnect-
ed from a network of supportive contacts / allies leaves them vulnerable
to exploitation and conquest by aggressive outsiders. The problem is
particularly acute when the land occupied by a given community is rich
in natural resources which outside interests would like to exploit. Mini-
mally groups must reach agreement with outsiders to insure that their
isolation will be respected and that the actions of others do not impair
their own ability to survive. Self-interest alone would seem to require
isolated cultures to have at least some contact with others.

A more indefensible situation is one in which cultural groups continue
to have external relationships with others but attempt to maintain these
relationships on the basis of their own internal cultural narratives. Na-
tionalism, for example, may be understandable as a defensive mechanism
against an encroaching globalization that seeks to obliterate distinctive
cultural traditions, but is ultimately self-contradictory if the country in
question attempts to conduct international relations on the basis of a
purely national mindset. While the historically contingent and socially
situated nature of cultural discourses can be readily acknowledged, effec-
tive dialogue between cultures can be conducted only if the two groups
are able to transcend their particular "situatedness" and effectively take
into account the point of view of others with whom they have relations.
The inability to achieve a wider viewpoint means that relations come to
be conducted purely on the basis of self-interest and power rather than
on the basis of an ethical regard for others. Such myopia makes it im-
possible for cultures to effectively resolve problems between them and
may lead to increased conflict.

Ultimately, however, there is no intrinsic reason why cultures should
attempt to cut off communication between themselves. The issue is not
how to stop communication between cultures but rather how to conduct
communication in ways that do not allow some groups to dominate oth-
ers. From a bioregional perspective communication should be conducted

on the basis of free and equal exchanges between groups which enjoy relative independence and autonomy from each other. In light of the numerous relationships that already exist between cultures and the likelihood that these relationships will continue in one form or another for the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that cultures will retreat back into a purely parochial, contextual way of thinking.

Cross-cultural dialogue on a new global ethic is needed, then, to cope not only with the rise of global environmental problems but also with the emergence of a new global situation in which cross-cultural contacts have increased exponentially. Globalization has created an entirely new situation in which cross-cultural dialogue on ethics is not only possible, because of the communication networks which have already been established between cultures, but also necessary, in light of the numerous social and environmental problems that have been inherited from the attempt to globalize overconsumptive lifestyles and capitalist-style industrialization.

Since the relationships we have with others in a global context have an ethical dimension, there is a need for ethical dialogue on how we will interact both in relation to each other and in relation to the environment. Given the fact that the ethical perspectives which the respective cultures initially bring with them to the dialogue process were developed in relatively isolated socio-political contexts to handle relatively local human-human and human-nature interactions, it is necessary to create entirely new ethical perspectives which are adequate to address the entirely new set of social and environmental problems that we face as a result of globalization. The fact that we now inhabit a new global context thus requires transcending bioregional narratives and the creation of a new global ethic.

The cross-cultural dimension of bioregionalism has remained undertheorized, however, leaving bioregionalism open to the charge that it is inherently parochial and thus unable to effectively address problems which cut across cultural, political, and natural boundaries (Dudley 1995). To the contrary, it can be contended that bioregionalism in fact has the capacity make a significant contribution to cross-cultural dia-

logue on a global ethic. While the bioregional model encourages a diversity of cultural forms, both within and between cultures, and the development of variegated systems of rationality, knowledge, and ethics, it nonetheless recognizes that not all problems can be solved at the local community level — a fact which is particularly true in light of problems which have already been created by globalization.

Decentralization alone should go a long way towards alleviating these problems by decreasing opportunities for one culture to exploit the labor and resources of another and by making local communities responsible for the impact their cultural activities have on the particular bioregions they inhabit. Nonetheless, ongoing problems which require decision-making across political and cultural boundaries can only be resolved through cross-cultural deliberation. Such dialogue, it is contended, must concern itself with reaching a measure of agreement on the norms and principles that will govern the interactions cultures have both with their environments and with other cultures, and also with creating appropriate institutional frameworks which enable different cultures to effectively work together on problems of mutual concern.

Conclusion

The dominant development paradigm is based on the notion that continued economic growth will eventually help developing countries "catch up" with the developed countries in terms of material affluence. It can be argued that this goal is not only unachievable but also undesirable because it fails to meet the three goals proposed in the introduction to this paper. Specifically the dominant development paradigm fails to promote genuine well-being in terms of both human health and quality of life for all; it exacerbates rather than overcomes social inequalities both within and between cultures; and it undermines the ability of the environment to sustain both human and non-human flourishing, and reduces both natural and cultural diversity. The dominant development paradigm is, moreover, based on hierarchical and ultimately undemocratic forms of social organization which concentrate political and economic power in the hands of global elites; existing global institutions largely

serve the interests not of ordinary citizens but of these elites (further support for these claims can be found in Evanoff 2002).

Rather than create a "global monoculture" on the basis of the dominant paradigm, it can be suggested that natural and cultural diversity can best be maintained by adopting a bioregional model of cultural development which delinks North and South and fosters the creation of local economies and decentralized political institutions confederated at the appropriate levels to resolve mutual problems. What is needed is not so much an *environmental* ethic focused on the preservation of nature as a *bioregional* ethic which harmonizes self, society, and nature.

Bioregional ethics adopts a contextual approach which allows different forms of land use in different cultural and natural settings. Social justice can best be achieved by adopting a local, rather than a global, conception of carrying capacity: local bioregions are capable of supporting certain forms of culture, but not others, and cultures should not attempt to extend their own material affluence by expropriating resources from other bioregions in ways that undermine the ability of people living in those bioregions to develop their own culture in an ecologically sustainable way. Finally, while the concept of human well-being is to an extent culturally variable, there are certain basic needs which must be satisfied if people are to enjoy flourishing lives. At sustainable population levels, basic human needs can be met in ways that require neither unjust forms of overconsumption nor environmental degradation.

The creation of such an "alternative world order" explicitly links bioregionalism to the social libertarian project of disrupting hierarchical social structures and restructuring global society in a way that overcomes the domination of both humans over humans and humans over nature. In a globalized context, such disruption cannot occur by simply retreating into communal enclaves but only through the development of a "new internationalism" based on various forms of cross-cultural solidarity among non-elite groups. What is needed to further this project is a more penetrating critique of the norms and values which inform the current dominant development paradigm, the further articulation of alternative norms from a bioregional perspective, and practical suggestions

on the sorts of transitions that may be necessary if we are to create societies which genuinely promote human flourishing, social justice, and environmental integrity.

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