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

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Richard Evanoff's *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics: A Transactional Approach to Achieving Ecological Sustainability, Social Justice, and Human Well-being* presents a „guiding vision "for constructing a „new global ethic" as an alternative to the Dominant Development Paradigm (DDP) that calls for unlimited economic growth. Evanoff argues that this goal is both unattainable and ultimately undesirable as it undermines ecological sustainability, intensifies social inequality, and fails to achieve genuine human well-being for all but a few.

Evanoff rightly points out that the DDP, rooted in neoliberal economic ideology, provides 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. " This, in turn, preserves dominant power interests at the expense of ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being. The "down-stream" consequences of this global order include globally shared problems of climate change, mass extinction, ubiquitous pollution, ocean acidification, and new forms of international food insecurity. *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics* is premised on the reasonable assumption that these globally shared social and environmental problems require construction of a new "global ethic" generated through cross-cultural dialogue.

Bioregionalism and Global Ethics offers both a sustained critique of the pro-growth paradigm and a detailed articulation of an alternative bioregional world order capable of best promoting sustainable human societies in harmony with the natural world. In doing so, Evanoff provides an impressive review of the literature promoting an ecologically based global ethic. Indeed, the massive, detailed, and well-organized bibliography appended to the book is a valuable resource for scholars from a great variety of disciplines. From the ideas cited in this bibliography, Evanoff constructs a grand interdisciplinary synthesis from economic theory, co-evolutionary theory, environmental ethics, and bioregional studies to develop a framework for a new world order capable of constructing a new global ethic. And yet, this grand synthesis is structured to be harmonious with post-modern critiques of monological forms of rationality and the current ethos of diversity and multi-culturalism.

Most commentators agree that the term "bioregionalism" was coined in the early 1970s to classify an approach to environmental issues that emphasizes political and economic decentralization, local self-sufficiency, and a way of life for humans that fits

sustainably into the local ecosystem or "bioregion". As both an environmental movement and a social philosophy, bioregionalism envisions autonomous and decentralized communities rooted in local ecosystems or bioregions. On this view, political and economic institutions should rise naturally from local ecological realities and should consult what Wes Jackson has termed the "genius of place". Evanoff's goal, in arguing that a global system of bioregional communities linked through institutions emerging from shared discourse and dialogue offers the best hope for constructing a new global ethic, is nothing less than to foster an ethics of place, i.e. an ethic of place in dialogue with other ethics of place.

Evanoff contends that prior attempts to link social issues to environmental concerns were limited by a narrow focus on changing personal values and behavior or on the quest to reconceive nature as possessing some sort of inherent or intrinsic value. These approaches lack a framework "in which individual, social, and environmental concerns can be looked at not in isolation from each other, but rather in terms of their interrelationships." Towards this goal, Evanoff proposes a "transactional" understanding of the relationship between self, society, and nature that is rooted in co-evolutionary theory "which sees ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being as interrelated rather than as separate areas of ethical concern." On this view, self, society, and nature interact in dialectical ways so that the good of one does not diminish the good of the other. This transactional approach views humans as "both constituting and being constituted by the natural environments they inhabit" resulting in an understanding of the relation between self, society, and nature that overcomes the atomistic and dualist framework plaguing much of recent environmental philosophy.

The alternative bioregional global ethic proposed here seeks to maximize the three core values of ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being through 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. Instead of a single monolithic global ethic, Evanoff's bioregional alternative suggests that there should be adequate dialogue between a diversity of local cultures to promote the resolution of mutual problems. The global ethic emerging from such a bioregional guiding vision would not be grounded in a universalist view of human nature or in a culturally specific understanding of rationality but one that would arise from an on-going dialogue among the world's various bioregions while preserving biological and cultural diversity on a global scale.

While Evanoff's guiding vision of a global ethic emerging from inter-cultural dialogue does not offer specific global norms (as these will emerge through dialogue), he does defend some large parameters that would structure such a world order and the norms emerging from on-going dialogue. In addition to his three core values of ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well being Evanoff argues that

bioregional global ethic should pursue an ethics of "non-domination" compatible with critiques of hierarchy developed by social ecologists and eco-feminists.

On this view, the ethical norms arise not from the discovery of metaphysical properties of intrinsic value but through on-going dialogue from a variety of perspectives. Each community rooted in a particular place would construct its own bioregional ethical discourse through shared dialogue within its local culture and participate in the construction of a shared global ethic through dialogue among other bioregional communities. In turn, this notion frees a bioregional understanding of ethical discourse from being limited to the local community in which it originally emerges. A global environmental ethic can then be constructed through mutual dialogue among a diversity of bioregions without the totalization and colonization of any one particular hegemonic discourse. One of the great virtues of Evanoff's approach here is to preserve Jim Cheney's insights on how bioregions can provide grounding for ethical narratives without essentializing self, society, or nature and yet contribute to a broader global environmental ethic.

His chapters criticizing the dominant paradigm as well as his chapters developing an alternative vision weave together many insights from a wide variety of scholars and traditions structuring them into a coherent whole. The results make it a good bit easier to imagine a bioregional world order capable of generating a new global ethic. Evanoff's vision here is radical. The new world order he articulates would require deep structural and ideological changes requiring the sort of transformative politics articulated by international Green Party theorist John Rensenbrink. While Evanoff's focus is on the development of a new global ethic rather than a new global politics some readers will finish this book wanting more on the sorts of political transformations necessary to make possible the changes needed for the transition to a genuinely bioregional world order. Nevertheless, Evanoff manages to clearly show the inherent problems of the current global paradigm while providing a coherent alternative. This, of course, is the first step toward radical change. Evanoff does not shy away from the radicality of his project.

It is easy to think that the very idea of bioregionalism is a "beautiful but impractical idea", i.e. an overly idealist vision of an impossible utopia. Emma Goldman's response to the criticism that anarchism would never work is, perhaps, appropriate here. She argued that anarchism was impractical as it was incompatible with the then current economic and political realities. Our duty is therefore to change those current conditions so a more just future may emerge. It is true that, under current conditions, bioregionalism would never work. It is impractical. Under current conditions, the banks, seed companies, oil cartels, the military-industrial complex would prevent anything like a serious push toward a bioregional world order that would "challenge how power and wealth are distributed in society." What is needed is to work toward changing current conditions so that the vision of bioregionalists becomes both possible and practical. In many ways, this is the task Richard Evanoff

has set for himself in *Bioregionalism and Global Ethics*.

Scholars from a great variety of disciplines and perspectives will find this book to be useful, for its detailed analysis and its meticulous bibliography as well as its bold outlines of new path forward.